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DEWEY ANTICIPATES HABERMAS'S
PARADIGM OF COMMUNICATION:
THE CRITIQUE OF INDIVIDUALISM AND THE
BASIS FOR MORAL AUTHORITY IN
DEMOCRACY AND EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

This article presents a novel account of a key concept in John Dewey's reconstructionist theory specifically related to the nucleus underlying his idea of democracy: intersubjective communication, what Dewey called the "democratic criterion." Many theorists relate democracy to a form of rule. Consequently, discussions of democracy tend to be limited to functionalist theories. Dewey's idea of democracy establishes an important distinction from conventional theories by developing its radical, critical, evolutionary, and intersubjective potential. I argue that Dewey anticipated Jürgen Habermas's Paradigm of Communication in his reconstructionist social theory with potential to de-reify institutions and to empower human beings democratically.

Of unparalleled importance in John Dewey's democratic philosophy is his focus on the process of change, or the "continuous reconstruction of experience."¹ But how is change to take place and under what circumstances does it best occur? What are the ramifications of Dewey's theory of change and reconstruction on representative government and political rule? Is change expected to occur pragmatically as a planned process, or is change understood as inchoate phenomena occurring sporadically in Dewey's philosophy? Who determines change and the degree to which it shall take place? Why does Dewey prioritize democratic communication over other forms of communication?

Dewey clearly connects his philosophy of change and reconstruction to governance, but he develops an ontological basis for change that subsumes more than mere political rule. For Dewey, change and reconstruction are such fundamental parts of human experience that he represents them as part of a biological and evolutionary process of human adaptation to social and natural environments. Change and

reconstruction encompass all forms of life, not just politics, and because he perceives change in this way, he links the process of change with a deeply moral attribute of human existence, namely, democracy and communication. Since we all experience change naturally, Dewey develops a democratic moral theory of how social change should take place. Therefore, Dewey ruptures traditional political theories that view democracy purely as a form of governance, “as a system of command and obedience,” as Markell asserts, which “risk[s] sacrificing the spirit of insubordination that animates . . . change, interruption, openness, and novelty.”² Dewey’s philosophy elevates democratic change and social reconstruction, making them the background against which politics (and other spheres of social existence) are measured. In other words, the substance of social practices, economic activities, and political rule are assessed by the extent to which they adhere to the moral expectations of democratic experience.

The other key component in Dewey’s philosophy of change and reconstruction is communication, also an experience that must adhere to democratic principles in reaching consensus in a social order. Furthermore, the moral value of democratic communication is that it changes the participants involved in interaction. Again, Dewey conceives of this democratic process as an evolutionary means of social adaptation and transformation. For example, in *Democracy and Education* he asserts that the experience of communication “requires” the participants “to formulate” perspectives that are “not their own,” to understand something “as another would see it.” This is a process, he asserts, wherein participants “assimilate, imaginatively, something of another’s experience.” Moreover, it is virtuous because it contributes to actualizing “what one is capable of becoming through association with others in all the offices of life.”³ Growth requires penetrating the confines of custom and habit. The fundamental importance of communication and change or reconstruction are summarized by Dewey in terms of his “democratic ideal:”

The two elements in our criterion both point to democracy. The first signifies not only more numerous and more varied points of shared common interest, but greater reliance upon the recognition of mutual interests as a factor in social control. The second means not only freer interaction between social groups . . . but change in social habit—its continuous readjustment through meeting the new situations produced by varied intercourse. And these two traits are precisely what characterize the democratically constituted society.⁴ (Emphasis added)

Dewey’s focus on change, democracy, and communication anticipates Jürgen Habermas’s communication paradigm. In what follows, I analyze and compare Dewey’s and Habermas’s analysis of the moral and democratic (qua Dewey) dimensions of communication, and the intersubjective normative basis (qua Habermas) that both theorists develop. Dewey offers a distinctive philosophy of democratic communication that appears to have informed Habermas and contributed to the

latter's construction of an equally elaborate moral basis for social order. I attempt to explicate Dewey's theory of democratic communication and how it anticipates the moral basis of Habermas's contemporary communicative action theory, which is grounded in intersubjectivity. Both Dewey and Habermas emphasize the following elements in their underlying theories, which are listed in Figure 1. Change or reconstruction serves as a necessary expectation of any critical theory intended to advance or emancipate individuals from systems of power. Democratic experience contributes to growth or actualization through communication, the latter of which is a fundamentally natural means of experiencing the other elements.

Indeed, the degree of change permitted during any specified time, epoch, or place, whether social, political, economic or religious, remains circumscribed by existing cultural parameters and the extent to which these parameters are penetrable. Cultural limitations, for example, delimit the framework for acceptable debate and discourse, which include defining the participants who can enter into communication, the extent to which cultural and mystical traditions may be critiqued, and the presence or absence of expert, authoritative, or privileged "validity claims." Additional considerations include the extent to which institutional structures either facilitate or obstruct participation, and the degree to which existing cultural knowledge is capable of distinguishing between what Habermas refers to as "the objective, social, and subjective worlds," and the extent to which rationalities are differentiated as "propositional truth, normative rightness, [and] subjective truthfulness," according to Habermas. In addition, "cultural tradition must permit a reflective relation to itself" to allow for critique, and "action-oriented . . . success . . . freed from the imperatives of an understanding that is to be communicatively renewed."⁵

Likewise, Dewey asserts that readjustments to our understanding depend upon the extent to which education can "modify mental and moral attitudes" that have become static. What is necessary, according to Dewey, is "an educational reformation" that stimulates "thoroughgoing change in social life."⁶ The process of education, which includes recurring intersubjective critiques of the status quo in order to actualize desired change, is as instinctive, Dewey believed, as one's adaptation to an altering natural environment. Habituation is also a natural human inclination. We settle into new surroundings through a process of readjustment and adaptation, and what was once new becomes familiar and commonplace. "This enduring adjustment," according to Dewey, "supplies the background upon which are made specific adjustments, as occasion arises."⁷ Likewise, in criticizing Talcott Parson's social theory, Habermas addresses the fundamental importance of this background knowledge in developing his own communication theory. According to Habermas, it is "the interpretive accomplishments of participants in interaction, which make consensus possible [and] central to the concept of social order." It is through the "language-dependent processes of reaching understanding, he argues, [that] take place against the background of an intersubjectively shared tradition, especially of values accepted in common."⁸

Long before Habermas published his magnum opus on communicative action, Dewey concluded that humanity had yet to understand the significance of, and the potential benefits that could be generated by, socializing and systematizing democratic communication. More recent scholarship focusing on Dewey's communication theory, often referred to as the "neopragmatic interpretation of Dewey . . ." or "the pragmatic renaissance," views Dewey "as an advocate of education as communication," according to Englund. From this perspective, one that I share, "education is just one aspect of a democratic form of social life that is communicative."⁹ Education, like democracy, is overwhelmingly part of complex human experiences and therefore cannot be reduced solely to formal schooling, although it is the latter that rightfully takes center stage in Dewey's philosophical agenda.

Too often, Dewey asserted, "Men . . . want the crutch of dogma, of beliefs fixed by authority, to relieve them of the trouble of thinking and the responsibility of directing their activity by thought." Paraphrasing John Stuart Mill, Dewey concluded that traditional schooling, for example, was "better adapted . . . to mak[ing] disciples than inquirers."¹⁰ Dewey refers to "the ideal of a continuous reconstruction . . . of experience," which derives its "meaning or social content" by augmenting "the capacity of individuals to act as directive guardians of this reorganization," otherwise known as his "democratic criterion."¹¹ Acknowledging the "risks" that are often present during inquiry, only by increasing the number of individuals who take part in communicatively reconstructing society, "a widening of the area of vision through a growth of social sympathies," Dewey argued, "does thinking develop to include what lies beyond our direct interests: a fact of great significance for education."¹² Adhering to custom is a rational human response, according to Dewey, for it provides a settled and fixed foundation upon which to subsist, but he viewed parochialism and conventionality as "rigid" and too mechanical, thus inhibiting mankind's potential for progressive change. "By its very nature, a state is ever something to be scrutinized, investigated, searched for,"¹³ according to Dewey, but we too often reify social institutions by our "passive acquiescence . . . and a minimum of active control."¹⁴ Habermas refers to this as a process of system integration that has been decoupled from the lifeworld.¹⁵

Inquiry and critique of the status quo, the fundamentals of scientific investigations, are bold endeavors that Dewey sought to socialize in order to "dissolve" outdated, routinized, or prohibitive "custom[s]." Dewey's "democratic ideal" requires "the recognition of mutual interests," which can only take place through intersubjective communication, and it must always be amenable to change or "continuous readjustment."¹⁶ In *Democracy and Education*, for example, Dewey recognizes the value, in fact the necessity, of intersubjective (democratic) discourse when he claims that "competing philosophies" must come together for the practical purpose of reaching agreement. Diverse social, economic, and political groups often view their environments differently and sometimes in conflicting ways, and it is necessary,

he argues, to make possible the dialectical and democratic deliberations that can respond to emerging conflicts, broaden cultural horizons, and renew thinking.¹⁷ Recognizing the state as a fallible human construction, Dewey concluded that, "Almost as soon as its form is stabilized, it needs to be re-made."¹⁸ History provides proof of this, according to Dewey, in that as much as we try to achieve a utopia, it is impossible to construct a perfect state once and for all. There will always be unforeseen problems, even in a state that has been studiously predetermined by its founders. The ideal preconceived polity will always fall short of its conception, which is why "the formation of states must be" viewed as "an experimental process" and dependent upon continuous reconstruction through shared communication. Put differently, "The State must always be rediscovered," he declared.¹⁹

Dewey disliked institutional inertness, and, like Habermas, he believed the state should not determine social relationships, but that social relationships should be organized in ways that facilitate intersubjective communication and potentials for progressive change. "The belief in political fixity," he declared, "of the sanctity of some form of state consecrated by the efforts of our fathers and hallowed by tradition, is one of the stumbling blocks in the way of orderly and directed change," and "it is an invitation to revolt and revolution."²⁰ Likewise, Habermas viewed systems as "forming one system or discourse, which steer[s] communications . . . described in a language that objectivistically disregards actors' self-understanding."²¹ The State forms an important aspect of our environment, political and otherwise, and Dewey sought means to ensure the constant social adaptation to changing conditions and to enable citizens to hold systems accountable to a public will formed by intersubjective communication. States are merely reconstructions of what used to be considered new or novel. The seeds of change may be dormant for a time, but they eventually germinate into a new form. Political revolutions inform change, but the institutions that emerge after the dust has settled should be prevented from concretizing social relationships that simply regenerate a new "objective reason manifested in the [new] state."²² Building upon Immanuel Kant's *Pedagogics*, "creative effort" is facilitated when "men consciously strive . . . to educate their successors not for the existing state of affairs but so as to make possible a future better humanity." Otherwise, systems of education become mere conduits used to functionally reinforce the existing state of affairs, similar to the goals of "social efficiency."²³

Dewey's concern about the problem of freezing social institutions after the establishment of a state is shared by Sheldon Wolin. For example, Wolin asks what might be considered a Deweyan question: "If democracy is rooted in revolution, what of democracy is suppressed by a constitution?" In other words, according to Wolin, "When a democratic revolution leads to a constitution, does that mark the fulfillment of democracy, or the beginning of its attenuation?"²⁴ Of course, the answer to this question depends on the constitution and the extent to which it facilitates democratic participation and communication. Dewey was critical of contemporary politics

because, as he put it, “the Public seems to be lost,” that “popular imagination can conceive of no other way by which . . . governmental affairs [may be] carried on than by the façade of representative government,” which often serves as a veneer to perpetuate the interests of a few.²⁵ “A society which makes provision for participation in its good of all its members on equal terms,” according to Dewey, “and which secures flexible readjustment of its institutions through interaction of the different forms of associated life is in so far democratic.”²⁶ Bynum appears to agree, contending that “Dewey’s anti-essentialist assertion that society exists ‘in transmission, in communication,’ develops from an account of ‘life’ that opens *Democracy and Education* and forms the philosophical basis for Dewey’s conception of society and education.”²⁷ The lingering problem, which Dewey acknowledges, is that the American founding was not an attempt at democracy. Rather, the founding resulted in a constitution that separated, through a number of checks and balances, democratic accountability while contributing to a system, in Habermasian terms, which mostly took on a life of its own distinct from popular control. The problem of reifying political and social institutions can best be understood through Dewey’s view of the American and French Revolutions.

LOOKING BACK TO THE AMERICAN AND FRENCH REVOLUTIONS: UNDERSTANDING DEWEY’S CRITICISMS OF THE ENLIGHTENMENT

During the American and French Revolutions emotional claims and diatribes were devoted to the subject of regime change and the transformation of older systems or systems that had gone astray. The more radical perspective was expounded by individuals like Thomas Paine, who believed that the revolutions symbolized legitimate breaks from the dead weight of tradition once reflective conditions cultivated the possibility to reconstruct inherited practices. New powerful critiques of Britain’s and France’s monarchical regimes, founded on “Superstition” and “Power,” according to Paine, justified their overthrow and the substitution of new institutions based on enlightened reason to promote the common good. Believing the British government to be rotten to the core, Paine argued for supplanting it root and branch. “All hereditary government is in its nature tyranny,” Paine demurred.²⁸ The more conservative Edmond Burke, on the other hand, who believed that many of Britain’s and France’s cultural traditions were worth saving, believed that generational change must be gradual, pragmatic, respectful of existing institutions, and lawful. In his *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, Burke quotes from Euripides’s *Telephus*, “*Spartam nactus es; hanc exorna*” (Your lot is cast in Sparta, be a credit to it). Burke’s point was that a citizen must “make the most of the existing materials of his country” by balancing his “disposition to preserve” that which is beneficial with “an ability to improve” upon existing defects.²⁹

Burke and Paine helped define the parameters of debate and possibilities for change during the late eighteenth century, with Burke viewing the body politic as a

naturally evolving organism that is historically conditioned and relatively stable, and Paine shifting the emphasis from a pragmatic position to radically questioning the very premises upon which British representative government stood regardless of its duration. Both men saw value in change, but Burke admired tradition and prudence as much as Paine sought extrication from history by seeking revolutionary change and rebirth.³⁰ While Burke may have been too deferential to traditional authority and Paine too bombastic in developing a predetermined state of affairs, neither focused on the value of political arrangements that could enable an intersubjective and normatively based process of frequent renewal. Dewey recognized this shortcoming.

Dewey was critical of many Enlightenment thinkers beyond Paine and Burke, including Hobbes, Locke, Marx, and Adam Smith, all of whom were overly committed to establishing predetermined blueprints for ideal political arrangements. Dewey criticized Locke's foundationalism, for example, in the latter's development of "a rigid doctrine of natural rights inherent in individuals independent of social organization," as well as Locke's privileging "natural law" (metaphysically devised) over "positive law" (socially devised).³¹ In other words, Dewey criticized Locke and others because their theories hinged on ethereal and abstract principles, such as natural law, which had no social or worldly basis. In addition, Dewey found fault in their developing hyper-individualistic theories that not only privileged economic interests, but also resulted in what Habermas referred to later as "an anonymous system independent of the intentions of unconsciously sociated individuals, a system that followed its own logic and subjected society as a whole to the economically decoded imperatives of its self-stabilization." Of utmost importance is the fact that, as a "mechanism of social integration," the "political economy" emerged as "a non-normative one."³²

Habermas is reemphasizing the same scathing criticism that Dewey made half a century earlier with regard to the eclipse of the public. "Till the Great Society," by which Dewey meant individualistic, impersonal, economic society, "is converted into a Great Community" that gives priority to collective action, "the Public will remain in eclipse," he demurred. Antonio and Kellner similarly explain one of Habermas's criticisms of the western Enlightenment project as "seeking an Archimedean point" that is historically and culturally indefatigable, or in Habermas's own words, a theory that "start[s] with 'concrete ideals immanent in traditional forms of life.'" On the contrary, Habermas concludes, "the theory of communicative action . . . must proceed 'reconstructively'" and democratically as a function of "social critique."³³

Furthermore, Dewey voiced concern over the fact that "mass production" was not merely "confined to the factory," but that it had invaded the intimate and social spaces that should otherwise exist as venues for collective action. The "Public" was "lost," he complained, and the only way to restore the Public was to democratize communication. It "alone," he asserted, "can . . . create a great community."³⁴ Similarly, in *Democracy and Education* Dewey writes about the significance of intersubjective communication:

Impulses of communication and habits of intercourse have to be adapted to maintaining successful connections with others; a large fund of social knowledge accrues. As a part of this intercommunication one learns much from others. They tell of their experiences and of the experiences which, in turn, have been told them. In so far as one is interested or concerned in these communications, their matter becomes a part of one's own experience. Active connections with others are such an intimate and vital part of our own concerns that it is impossible to draw sharp lines, such as would enable us to say, "Here my experience ends; there yours begins." In so far as we are partners in common undertakings, the things which others communicate to us as the consequences of their particular share in the enterprise blend at once into the experience resulting from our own special doings.³⁵

According to Sheldon Wolin, Dewey disparaged the Enlightenment philosophers whose economic theories undermined their simultaneous support for the liberalization of politics. In other words, their support for a free market cultivated "a business culture that thwarted the democratic potential of" republican institutions. They fused the act of seeking self-interest in the economic realm with the political and civic realm. This "reduction of politics to interest," according to Wolin, "has cast a powerful shadow on modern politics,"³⁶ and Dewey was cognizant of this fact during his day. Government was conceived as an arbiter of conflicting individual interests rather than as a political means of facilitating democratic communication. Of course, the American Revolution was not intended to secure a democratic government, which is why Dewey finds fault with it. "Mobocracy" was conflated with democracy, and the founders structured the new constitution to delimit democratic possibilities. Political liberty was tempered while freedom in the economic realm was left virtually unfettered.

In 1971, John Rawls similarly reflected upon the rationalities that distinguished a liberal market with liberal democracy by asserting, "The theory of competitive markets [is] not moved by the desire to act justly" and to realize "just . . . arrangements." Rather, these "normally require . . . the use of sanctions" in order to "stabilize" conflict resulting from "persons who oppose one another as indifferent if not hostile powers." The atomistic and self-interested nature of "private society," including the competitive market that is intended to channel and give life to these principles, reminds us that "private society is not held together by a public conviction that its basic arrangements are just and good in themselves, but by the calculations of everyone . . . pursu[ing] their personal ends."³⁷ The traditional emphasis on negative liberty and individualism has resulted in modern political institutions that focus primarily on managing the indifferent and competing interests of private individuals and groups. And because political institutions have been infected by powerful groups lobbying for private interests, in the same way that increased capital can offer advantages in the economic sphere, the public realm has been

eclipsed by a market mentality. In this sense, political institutions become mere mechanisms for pursuing private benefits, and those persons or corporate bodies that possess the greatest capital too often enjoy not just market share, but political influence and political benefits.³⁸ Communication has been removed from the great mass of citizens, which Dewey describes as the loss of the Public. The “machine-like . . . relationships” that have emerged from a market ethos and spilled over into the social and political spheres have resulted in the objectification of individuals as means to achieve self-interested and competitive ends, according to Dewey. These relationships, what Habermas subsequently refers to as instrumentally oriented, are not “social” ones, but rather embody attempts to control. “Genuine social life,” according to Dewey, “is . . . identical with communication,” and when communication is reserved for select members of a community or group, it is neither “social,” in Dewey’s terms, nor “educative.” Agreement “demands communication, and communication must be democratic for agreement to achieve legitimacy.”³⁹

Interest group politics results in too many policies that fail to meet Dewey’s democratic expectations; namely, the notion that public policies should be the result of democratic processes that privilege equal and comprehensive communication so that the normative agreements generated by this process gain the broadest possible legitimacy among those who must live under their results. In Habermasian terms, “A communicatively achieved agreement has a rational basis” in that “it cannot be imposed by” any of the parties “whether instrumentally through intervention in the situation directly or strategically through influencing the decisions of opponents.” Furthermore, “agreement can . . . be objectively obtained by force, but what comes to pass manifestly through outside influence or the use of violence cannot count subjectively as agreement.”⁴⁰

Rather than extensive political oversight of the economy, the market has subverted representative government’s potential normative legitimacy. However, unlike Dewey, who viewed democracy as an existential activity, Rawls’s liberalism prioritizes “the role of administration,” according to Wolin, over participatory democracy. Conceptualizing the state as an arbiter of competing interests not only results in the encapsulation of politics within a market ideology, but it also reduces the citizen and civic virtue to instrumental—and goal-oriented—rationalities. Wolin concludes, for example, that “The demos has been hammered into resignation, into fearful acceptance of the economy as the basic reality of its existence, so huge, so sensitive, so ramifying in its consequences that no group, party, or political actors dare alter its fundamental structure.”⁴¹

Hannah Arendt likewise concluded that the constitution’s structure not only diminished possibilities for democratic governance, but it also circumvented this ideal in favor of a labyrinth-esque framework that largely protected the power of external economic and aristocratic interests.⁴² This is why most democratic gains that have been achieved by women, the disabled, African Americans, Hispanics, and others have largely occurred through the use of extra-constitutional or unconventional political means. Without the communicative democracy Dewey strove

to justify, individuals “are given up to the service of ends external to themselves.”⁴³ They are treated as objects that “lose . . . identity as . . . living thing[s].”⁴⁴ They are acted upon rather than acting together for agreed upon ends. The key for achieving progress, Dewey believed, lies in social “intercourse and communication of experience.” In *Democracy and Education*, for example, he concludes that

A society which makes provision for participation in its good of all its members on equal terms and which secures flexible readjustment of its institutions through interaction of the different forms of associated life is in so far democratic. Such a society must have a type of education which gives individuals a personal interest in social relationships and control, and the habits of mind which secure social changes without introducing disorder.⁴⁵

Likewise, Habermas asserts that, “To the extent that the hypothetical discussion of normative validity claims is institutionalized, the critical potential of speech can be brought to bear on existing institutions.” However, instrumentally oriented action manifested in the economic sphere has permeated the public sphere to such an extent that it has narrowed opportunities to institutionalize civic spaces that could otherwise democratically empower intersubjectively determined agreements. “With the legal institutionalization of the monetary medium,” according to Habermas, “success-oriented action steered by egocentric calculations of utility,” action typical within market systems, “loses its connection to action oriented by mutual understanding.”⁴⁶ Furthermore, according to Habermas,

This strategic action, which is disengaged from the mechanism of reaching understanding and calls for an objectivating attitude even in regard to interpersonal relations, is promoted to the model for methodically dealing with a scientifically objectivated nature. In the instrumental sphere, purposive activity gets free of normative restrictions to the extent that it becomes linked to flows of information from the scientific system.⁴⁷

In addition to the instrumentally oriented action prevalent in the economic sphere, the social sphere, according to Habermas, has undergone what Weber referred to earlier as “total administration.” Social relationships have become ever more regulated by bureaucratic systems and institutionalized legal processes that are void of democratic communication. In other words, these relationships, whether or not identified by recipients receiving public assistance, are “embedded in the context of a life history and of a concrete form of life” that often gets reduced “to a violent abstraction, not merely because it has to be subsumed under the law, but so that it can be dealt with administratively.”⁴⁸ The administrative and legal processes take priority over understanding the multifarious complexities of each client, and the latter become objectified in the same way that an inanimate object is acted upon as described by Dewey in *Democracy and Education*.⁴⁹ (1944, 1–5). Similarly, Habermas’s criticism

of the welfare state is that its administrative and legal functions take on the same kind of instrumental, goal-oriented action embodied in the economic sphere, but for different purposes: "The process of providing social services takes on a reality of its own, nurtured above all by the professional competence of public officials, the framework of administrative action, biographical and current "findings", the readiness and ability to cooperate of the person seeking the service or being subjected to it."⁵⁰

Dewey criticized this social phenomenon, witnessing its growth following the Gilded Age and during the early twentieth century. In the midst of the Great Depression, for example, Dewey wrote in *The Social Frontier* and criticized the implementation of "compulsory patriotic rites," required Bible reading in schools, and teaching a doctrinaire knowledge of the constitution. "Three [American] states" he disparaged made it "a crime" to teach "evolution," and several more required "loyalty oaths" among "students as a condition of graduation." He was appalled by the fact that teachers unions and tenure were under attack, all of which represented an atmosphere that he described as "militant" and formulaic.⁵¹ These were reactionary attempts to impose doctrinaire and self-interested curricula onto the public schools in order to reproduce the status quo and allegiance to an imposing dominant culture. In *Democracy and Education*, Dewey clarified this by asserting that an individual's "seeming attention, his docility, his memorizings and reproductions . . . will partake of intellectual servility." Moreover, "such a condition of intellectual subjection is needed for fitting the masses into a society where the many are not expected to have aims or ideas of their own, but to take orders from the few set in authority."

What Dewey was defining in the early twentieth century was antisocial, and therefore, anti-communicative forms of existence and control. Such conditions are "not adapted to a society which intends to be democratic," he concluded.⁵² The permeation of the market's influence in areas that were once considered to be public responsibilities, including schooling, has been so extensive as to relegate civil society to a pliable condition that allows it to be molded to serve the former's demands and interests. Contributing to the eclipse of the public and civic realm is the fact that the language of economics, which has been so prevalent in our contemporary national discourse, appears neutral in the same way that positivism positioned the social sciences during the twentieth century. In other words, the laws of supply and demand, inflation and interest rates, changes in employment and unemployment are often invoked as natural phenomena (i.e., laws) and, therefore, void of ideology. Of course, this is inaccurate, but the contemporary ideologies of neoliberalism and libertarianism tend to be portrayed as naturally apolitical and amoral market mechanisms that are simply the result of uninhibited interest-seeking individuals. These ideologies are portrayed as innocuous and free from racist, classist, and sexist intentions or effects because their outcomes are depicted as merely the natural outgrowth of an invisible hand, which represents nothing more than the sum of society's properly functioning organic parts. According to Habermas,

To the degree that the economic system subjects the life-forms of private households and the life conduct of consumers and employees to its imperatives, consumerism and possessive individualism, motives of performance, and competition gain the force to shape behavior. The communicative practice of everyday life is one-sidedly rationalized into a utilitarian life-style; this . . . induced shift to purposive-rational action orientations calls forth the reaction of a hedonism freed from the pressures of rationality. As the private sphere is undermined and eroded by the economic system, so too is the public sphere by the administrative system. The bureaucratic disempowering and desiccation of spontaneous processes of opinion- and will-formation expands the scope for engineering mass loyalty and makes it easier to uncouple political decision-making from concrete, identity-forming contexts of life. Insofar as such tendencies establish themselves, we get Weber's (stylized) picture of a legal domination that redefines practical questions as technical ones and dismisses demands for substantive justice with a legalistic reference to legitimation through procedure.⁵³

Preceding Habermas, Dewey once concluded that "the state," the political sphere that embodies the entire realm of public activity, "was a sum of [all its] units,"⁵⁴ and Honohan more recently declared "civil society" a larger public unit that comprises all of its parts including "associations" that "are hierarchical, non-deliberative and [that] operate out of the public eye."⁵⁵ Dewey (and Habermas after him) developed theories that strive for genuine democratic governance. A genuine democracy results in policies that are normatively and legitimately authoritative because, as opposed to the decisions produced by authoritarian regimes, the decisions and actions of its subunits, such as the market, are held accountable to a higher archetype.

Today, the economy continues to expand its reach into new areas of life—privatization of military defense, prison services, and public education, to name just a few—and this is inverting what should be the predominant authority exercised by a genuine democratic government over its subunits. A government whose policies embody the confluence of democratically developed norms of consensus has, on the other hand, very different implications than a government whose policies are implemented as a result of oblique or unscrupulous schemes. Political and public decision making should not "be organized like corporate bodies," according to Habermas,⁵⁶ but Dewey goes farther by arguing that democratic decision making should filter into other subunits including, but not limited to, the economy. Democracy is prioritized by Dewey in its relation to the market. In fact, Habermas asserts that Dewey, more than any other philosopher, wrote about "'the essential need' to advance 'the methods and conditions of debate, discussion and persuasion.'" It was Dewey's neopragmatism, and his emphasis on communication, that resulted in Habermas drawing the following conclusion about his own discourse theory: "the democratic procedure is institutionalized in discourses and bargaining

processes by employing forms of communication that promise that all outcomes reached in conformity with the procedure are reasonable." Deliberative democracy "is especially meant to be educative, by providing the "methods and conditions' of political will-formation that Dewey . . . considered '*the problem of the public.*'"⁵⁷

In response to the overwhelming influence of the market and industrialization during his day, Dewey offered a newly developed reconstructionist approach that shifted the focus to fostering a pervasively democratic system of communication that could continually renew normatively constructed agreements among citizens who were themselves subjected to these agreements. Too many associations in society, Dewey argued, "lack . . . [a] reciprocity of interest," such as is the case when "a gang or clique brings its antisocial spirit into relief," a spirit that embodies "interests 'of its own'" and "which shut it out from full interaction with other groups, so that its prevailing purpose is the protection of what it has got, instead of reorganization and progress through wider relationships."⁵⁸ According to Dewey, his "Democratic Ideal" required that we acknowledge our interdependence, a "recognition of mutual interests as a factor in social control," and the desire for "continuous readjustment" by confronting change with continuous "intercourse."⁵⁹ Democracy served as the archetype in Dewey's sociopolitical theory and his educational philosophy. Hierarchically speaking, democracy, which requires reflective and ongoing communication, is given priority over all other subunits. "A democracy," Dewey famously asserted

. . . is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience. The extension in space of the number of individuals who participate in an interest so that each has to refer his own action to that of others, and to consider the action of others to give point and direction to his own, is equivalent to the breaking down of those barriers of class, race, and national territory which kept men from perceiving the full import of their activity. These more numerous and more varied points of contact denote a greater diversity of stimuli to which an individual has to respond; they consequently put a premium on variation in his action. They secure a liberation of powers which remain suppressed as long as the incitations to action are partial, as they must be in a group which in its exclusiveness shuts out many interests.⁶⁰

Learning is, therefore, not simply the act of inculcating in children a society's traditional values, norms, and customs, as important as this is. It is an attempt to cultivate unknown potentialities in each individual, which cannot be fully known unless the individual is freed from the stultifying institutions that privilege individualistic ontologies. Individuals must be given opportunities to engage in and reconstruct their environment interdependently with fellow social beings, beings who vary in multiple respects and therefore contribute multiple perspectives from which each can engage with, reflect upon, and act collectively to solve problems.

Only by experiencing the widest possible range of a person's diverse social environment through communication with others can he or she break the parameters of a limited parochial knowledge and evolve into a higher plane of existence and potential, what Dewey refers to as growth. Aaron Schutz summarizes this goal nicely when he paraphrases from Dewey's *Democracy and Education* that, "democratic communities create a tremendous web of conscious interdependence in which there are 'numerous and varied . . . points of shared' interest that are interpreted and acted upon differently by different participants. In this way, 'the intellectual variations of the individual in observation, imagination, judgment, and invention . . . can become 'the agencies of social progress.'"⁶¹

DEWEY'S SOCIOPOLITICAL PHILOSOPHY: A DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY WILL SHAPE POSSIBILITIES FOR DEMOCRATIC SCHOOLS

Despite relevant concerns over the pragmatic problems that would likely emerge in expanding access to deliberations in a multicultural society, as highlighted by Heather Voke, democratic schooling is an essential ingredient in Dewey's philosophy conceived to overcome these difficulties. The rules of speech and communication vary among cultures, but this is justification for supporting a communicative theory rather than an argument opposing it, as with Voke.⁶² Everyone should have their perspectives challenged or critiqued, which is the essence of Dewey's democratic and intersubjective theory. How else can we diffuse conflict and implement public policies that have been considered from multiple perspectives? Differences in perspectives must be brought together, according to Dewey, in order to broaden understanding and intellectual horizons in a diverse society.

Furthermore, Bynum successfully corrects an oversimplified reading of Dewey by Cornell West. According to Bynum, West criticizes Dewey's idealism, arguing that the latter's deliberative democracy is impracticable due to deeply institutionalized forms of oppression in the United States. Despite West's reasonable concern, Bynum responds to this criticism by clarifying Dewey's philosophy: "It is far from clear that the future way of life Dewey envisions would" be so limited, "considering his belief that we must constantly modify social life by chopping away the 'dead wood' of newly useless traditions as we reshape conjoint social projects in response to constant, critical reevaluations of our present experiences' significance."⁶³ In response to West, Bynum clarifies Dewey's definition of "the social," which is elaborated in chapter seven of *Democracy and Education*: It is "not simply anything that goes on within a social group, but rather as a particular kind of nonoppressive, mutually interested relatedness that enables growth in the range and quality of human experience." Accordingly, "Dewey prepares a standard for judging societies," according to Bynum, which adequately addresses West's criticism, in my opinion.⁶⁴ Römer refers to Dewey's idea of growth as "a kind of endless doubling of intelligence," which "can

only take place in an open and democratic society." Contrarily, "closed groups . . . cannot be genuine social groups and, therefore, are unable to offer education in its proper sense (they can only offer instruction)," as Römer explains.⁶⁵

It is not surprising, for example, that Dewey chose schooling and education as parts of his ontological theory, which give priority to the democratic and interdependent elements of human nature and recognize the necessity of bridging multicultural communities through the education of youth. Where better, we might ask, in a society absorbed by institutions that otherwise promote instrumental-, strategic-, and utilitarian-oriented rationalities to develop future citizens than in schools that could, if freed from these rationalities, inculcate democratic and communicative capabilities in future citizens? Democratic schooling, Dewey hoped, would focus on developing the natural or instinctual tendency for humans to engage in social communication and reconstruction in order to cooperatively cohabitate. As a subunit of the state, formal schooling represents the broader culture from which it was conceived and for which it is utilized.

Schooling in modern society is to serve as a conduit for developing in children "virtue" or the "means to be fully and adequately what one is capable of becoming through association with others in all the offices of life," Dewey urged.⁶⁶ It appears that Dewey viewed formal schooling as the necessary institutional means for countering the otherwise negative impact of a cultural ethos that privileged individualistic culture buttressed by both political and economic institutions. Dewey viewed these institutions as antithetical to the development of human potential, which required meaningful associational practices resulting from free and equal communication. "All education which develops power to share effectively in social life is moral," Dewey concluded. "Learning" has "a social aim," and when it effectively encompasses Dewey's idealized sociality, "the school becomes itself . . . a miniature community."⁶⁷

Dewey was one of the first modern theorists to methodically fuse education and democracy into a sociopolitical philosophy. Educational philosophers since Plato and Aristotle have promoted education as a public good (albeit for different purposes), but today, we are witnessing a paradigmatic attack on the idea of the public itself as it is consumed by market forces. I agree with Alison Kadlec when she concludes that, "Dewey's notion of experience is intersubjective, communicative, and social," as well as a living through of "the consequences of our actions," which "taken together . . . form the basis of a powerful resource for critical reflection and social transformation."⁶⁸ Furthermore, Dewey offered a more radical democratic communication theory than did Habermas because he sought to extend this normative process beyond political institutions to include "economic, international, educational, scientific . . . artistic, [and] religious"⁶⁹ institutions.

Habermas clearly perceived Dewey's contribution to a pragmatic theory of communication when he offered the following conclusion: "No one has worked out [an institutionalization of the democratic procedure . . . by employing forms of communication . . . that promise reasonable outcomes . . . more energetically

than John Dewey.⁷⁰ Anticipating Habermas's communicative action theory, Dewey developed a deeply moral philosophy by ontologically locating social action and change democratically through communication. This, in my opinion, is Dewey's most formidable accomplishment and one that can be seen throughout his works, but, in particular, in *Democracy and Education*.

NOTES

1. John Dewey, *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education* (New York: The Free Press, 1944), 80.
2. Patchen Markell, "The Rule of the People: Arendt, Arche, and Democracy," *American Political Science Review* 100, no. 1 (2005): 1–14.
3. Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 5–6, 358.
4. *Ibid.*, 86–87.
5. Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action: Reason and the Rationalization of Society* (Boston: Beacon Press), 71–72, 100.
6. Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 328–29, 331.
7. *Ibid.*, 47.
8. Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action: Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987), 214.
9. Tomas Englund, "Rethinking Democracy and Education: Towards an Education of Deliberative Citizen," *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 32, no. 2 (2000): 308.
10. Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 339.
11. *Ibid.*, 322.
12. *Ibid.*, 148.
13. John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems* (Athens, OH: Swallow Press, 1988), 31.
14. John Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 47.
15. Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action: Lifeworld and System*, 150–53.
16. John Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 86.
17. *Ibid.*, 326–27.
18. Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, 31–33.
19. *Ibid.*, 33–34.
20. *Ibid.*, 34.
21. Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 48.
22. Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 94–95.
23. *Ibid.*, 95–97.
24. Sheldon Wolin, "Norm and Form: The Constitutionalizing of Democracy," in *Athenian Political Thought and the Reconstruction of American Democracy*, eds. J. Peter Euben, John R. Wallach, and Josia Ober (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 29.
25. Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, 116, 119.
26. Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 99.
27. Gregory Bynum, "John Dewey's Anti-Essentialism and Social Progress," *Journal of Social Philosophy* 36, no. 3 (2005): 369.
28. Thomas Paine, *Rights of Man* (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), 69, 172.

29. Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1987), 161.
30. For an interesting comparison of Edmund Burke and John Dewey, see Seth Vannatta, "Pragmatic Conservatism: A Defense," *Humanitas* 25, nos. 1–2 (2012): 20–43.
31. John Dewey, *The Later Works of John Dewey*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston, vol. 11, 1935–1937 (Southern Illinois University, 2008), 7.
32. Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, 45.
33. Antonio, Robert J. and Kellner, Douglas, "Communication, Modernity, and Democracy in Habermas and Dewey," *Symbolic Interaction* 15, no. 3 (1992): 280–82.
34. Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, 96, 98, 116, 142.
35. Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 185–86.
36. Sheldon Wolin, *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought, Expanded Edition* (Princeton University Press, 2004), 251, 512–13.
37. John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Harvard University Press, 1971), 512–22.
38. An excellent contemporary example may be gleaned from the US Supreme Court's 2010 decision in *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*. In its decision, the Court's majority monetarily quantified what was intended to be an inalienable and fundamental or "natural" constitutional right to free speech. Destroying even the resemblance of equal "natural" rights by linking speech rights with one's ability (or inability) to contribute to political campaigns, the Court commodified free speech (558 U.S. 310).
39. Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 5.
40. Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action: Reason*, 287.
41. Wolin, *Politics and Vision*, 578.
42. Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 253.
43. Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 252.
44. *Ibid.*, 1.
45. *Ibid.*, 99.
46. Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action: Lifeworld*, 196.
47. *Ibid.*
48. *Ibid.*, 362–63.
49. Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 1–5.
50. Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action: Lifeworld*, 363.
51. John Dewey, "Can Education Share in Social Reconstruction?" in *The Social Frontier: A Critical Reader*, ed. Eugene F. Provenzo, Jr. (New York: Peter Lang, 2011), 27, 29.
52. Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 305.
53. Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action: Lifeworld*, 325.
54. Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, 111.
55. Iseult Honohan, *Civic Republicanism* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 234.
56. Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, 171.
57. *Ibid.*, 304, 316.
58. Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 86.
59. *Ibid.*, 87.
60. *Ibid.*
61. Aaron Schutz, "John Dewey and 'a Paradox of Size': Democratic Faith at the Limits of Experience," *American Journal of Education* 109, no. 3 (2001): 292.
62. Heather M. Voke, "Public Deliberation, Communication across Difference, and Issues-Based Service Learning," *Philosophy of Education Yearbook* (2001): 361–69.

63. Bynum, "John Dewey's Anti-Essentialism," 371.

64. Ibid, 372.

65. Thomas Aastrup Rømer, "Imagination and Judgment in John Dewey's Philosophy: Intelligent Transactions in a Democratic Context," *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 44, no. 2 (2012): 136

66. Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 358.

67. Ibid, 360.

68. Alison Kadlec, "Reconstructing Dewey: The Philosophy of Critical Pragmatism," *Polity* 38, no. 4 (2006): 522, footnote 8.

69. Quoted in Antonio and Kellner, "Communication, Modernity, and Democracy," 291.

70. Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, 304.

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