

# WHAT'S THE USE OF CONFLICT IN DEWEY? TOWARD A PEDAGOGY OF COMPROMISE

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## ABSTRACT

In this article, we argue for the importance of the notion of conflict in John Dewey's philosophy. Indeed, many criticisms have been leveled against Dewey regarding his political philosophy and his philosophy of education based on the idea that he underestimated the conflict inherent in human affairs. These criticisms are compelling because they link the two sides—educational and political—of Dewey's philosophy. Critics simultaneously address their criticisms to one side vis-à-vis the adverse consequences caused as a result of the other side. In response to this analysis, we want to argue that conflict is indispensable for understanding the theory of inquiry and its validity in the search for knowledge as well as in confronting social and political tensions. In this way, we will first see the criticisms of Dewey's lack of emphasis on the notion of conflict in his philosophy. Then we will see how, in response to these criticisms, it is possible to determine three uses of conflict in Dewey's work. Finally, we will turn to the role that this notion can play in developing a pedagogy of compromise based on Dewey's educational philosophy. Thus, we hope to respond to criticisms of Dewey's work without discarding either side—educational or political—of his theorizing.

## INTRODUCTION

The reception of Dewey's work has suffered, in terms of his political philosophy, from a certain mistrust. First, in the field of education, Dewey's refusal to grant "ultimate" or "high" status to certain values, even those of the French Republic, has made him a mistrusted figure.<sup>1</sup> Apart from the pedagogues of *Education Nouvelle*, which defied the then dominant "Cartesian tradition of the dualistic philosophy of reason" in France, Dewey was little studied before the 1960s. In 2013, Kambouchner perceived an opposition between Dewey and Durkheim;<sup>2</sup> however, the French reception of *The Public and Its Problems* in 1927 also suffered from suspicion and skepticism.<sup>3</sup> To begin, there was suspicion with regard to this philosophical approach, which has always stood somewhat in opposition to Marxism,

then the main European intellectual opposition force on the left, because Dewey's approach negated many of Marxism's observations and concepts.<sup>4</sup> However, there was also skepticism about the theoretical basis of democracy, in which prosperity and serenity often appear superficially.

In this context, it seems that individuals will mutually recognize the problems they have in common and begin to inquire together as to how to resolve them. Indeed, in *The Public and Its Problems*, it appears that the question of self-recognition by the public is necessary and resolved by a quasi-magic process in which the interactions of citizens gradually lead them to institutionalize legitimate officers for all concerned. There are many words to describe this process: "convergence," "harmony," a "qualitatively unified situation," "*recherche interpersonnelle du commun*," and so on. Yet it is with regard to this idea of mutual recognition and resolution that Dewey's political pragmatism seems to be most fragile,<sup>5</sup> and one can question whether Dewey does not consciously rule out the importance of conflict in public education. The risk is that if there is a disagreement between stakeholders due to the difference in the interests of each, then this can impede or even completely inhibit any special investigations. In this case, refusing to accept conflict as a dynamic political tool forces the public and critics to think of a democracy that is blind to strikes, blocked situations, social confrontations, in short, of the violence of those who do not want compromise.

In response to these accusatory questions, we can only ask ourselves in what sense Dewey sees conflict as a "gadfly of thought," and whether it really has its place in the education of the public.<sup>6</sup>

However, the conflict, understood as the violent opposition of two opposing parties, preoccupied young Dewey's mind. A discussion with Jane Addams, recounted in John Dewey's correspondence with Alice Chipman Dewey (October 10, 1894), may give us an idea of the extent of this problem. It was in June 1894 when 125,000 railway workers went on strike against the Pullman Company, whose director, George Pullman, had decreased the workers' wages and refused to discuss this reduction with the unions. At that time, Dewey had just moved to Chicago and in the role of a "social practicing scientist,"<sup>7</sup> he saw this social movement as an opportunity "to get the social organization thinking."<sup>8</sup> On the Fourth of July, Dewey met with strikers and sympathized with their leader, Eugene Debs. Furthermore, confronted with the hostility and misunderstanding toward the workers on the part of the government, Dewey admitted that he had "a good deal of [the] anarchist" in him.<sup>9</sup> For more than a month this strike was marked by violence on both sides, with some bosses employing African American workers to break the strike and others burning company buildings and derailing a locomotive.<sup>10</sup> The strike ended in a bloodbath: 12,000 U.S. Army soldiers killed 13 strikers and wounded another 57.

Like many democratic intellectuals of his time, Dewey could not reconcile with himself this use of force by the state, especially since it takes the form of an act that, if not legitimate, seems necessary for the restoration of order. Dewey sees

this antagonism between Pullman's bosses and workers as a failure of democracy that damages the efforts of moderate liberals, particularly those at Hull House, both socially and politically. The resolution of the conflict through violence seems to him to be politically unavoidable and yet it is contrary to his democratic ideals.

But Jane Addams, who also deplored this incident, did not give up and would even "interiorly convert" John Dewey to a democratic ideal that would always search to overcome the conflict in the compromise.<sup>11</sup> For this she would use a biblical metaphor: that of Jesus driving the merchants out of the temple of Jerusalem, offended and angry at those who profane this sacred place through their commercial activities. For Addams, Jesus failed in this place. The use of this violence is not a conviction but the thoughtless reaction of a man who is still only a man. Thus, even if Christ himself is confronted with conflict, his reaction is still useless and dangerous. The conflict, for Addams, does not make it possible to add to the recognition of the common good, and, on the contrary, delays and distorts it.<sup>12</sup> Or, according to Louis Ménand, "antagonism (as she [Jane Addams] had tried to explain to Dewey) was only misunderstanding, a tension in the progress toward a common outcome."<sup>13</sup>

Impressed by his friend's conviction regarding the true nature of the aforementioned biblical story, Dewey would "have to give it all up and start over again" in terms of his reflections on the role of conflict within his theory of democracy.<sup>14</sup> The task is not simple, for it is necessary neither to deny the existence of conflict within political reality nor to keep at a distance the normative force that Marxist theory wants to confer on it. Thus, Dewey seeks to draw a middle path between pacifists and warmongers. To do so, he must first respond to the criticisms of Reinhold Niebuhr made during his time. We will complement these criticisms with more recent ones from Aaron Schutz to broaden the scope of the reflection. Next, Dewey must revise his Hegelian reading of conflict to propose a new dialectical conception that would account theoretically for Jane Addams's faith. Thus, it is important to see how Dewey's criticisms allowed him to clarify his idea of the value of conflict, particularly in his philosophy of education, where Dewey goes so far as to construct a "pedagogy of compromise," conscious of conflict and making it an element of the reconstruction process promoted by pragmatism.

In this way, the criticisms of Dewey's failure to fully acknowledge the importance of the notion of conflict in his philosophy becomes more intelligible. Subsequently, we will see how, in response to these criticisms, it is possible to determine three uses of conflict in Dewey's work. Finally, it is the role that the notion of conflict can play in this pedagogy of compromise, based on Dewey's education philosophy, that will be the focus of our attention.

## I/ CRITICISM BY NIEBUHR AND SCHUTZ

Although there are many criticisms of Dewey on this issue, two of them are particularly effective, though they actually make the same point, which is the lack of importance of conflict in Dewey's thinking. The first, by Reinhold Niebuhr, is a

critique made during Dewey's lifetime and focuses on practical ineffectiveness in politics. The second, more recent attack is that of Aaron Schutz, where Dewey is criticized because of the political danger that his pedagogy allegedly forgets the notion of conflict. Thus, Dewey's theory is criticized for eluding the notion of conflict both in and through political practice and pedagogy.

### 1/ Reinhold Niebuhr's Criticism

Reinhold Niebuhr's critique of Dewey's political philosophy is straightforward. In his 1932 work, *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics*, Niebuhr argues that Dewey gives too much power to the role of education and thus deludes himself regarding the power of social transformation. These seem to be, according to Niebuhr, "middle-class prejudices" that mask conflicts of interest in any form of political ideology.<sup>15</sup> He implies here, according to Marxist thought, that the middle class to which Dewey belongs is deluding itself on the nature of politics because it is the class that has the most to lose in a conflict that would force it to take sides in favor of the dominant or the dominated. The consequence of this denial of conflict as a political tool is only to use reforms that rely on social transformation without a balance of forces as political strategy, thus opposing the revolution (which is an expression and reversal of this balance of forces). On the contrary, Niebuhr argues for the existence of this balance of forces and the need to address the conflict, even if it means triggering a civil war, in order to overcome the domination it expresses. Niebuhr uses the recent historical example of the American Civil War, which led to the abolition of slavery, to justify this theory historically.

Thus, for Niebuhr, a theoretical insufficiency renders Dewey's theory of democracy profoundly inefficient and impractical: "Conflict is inevitable, and in this conflict power must be challenged by power. That fact is not recognized by most of the educators, and only very grudgingly admitted by most of the social scientists."<sup>16</sup> The central point of Niebuhr's argument is that Dewey misunderstands the notion of conflict because he axiologically opposes "intelligence" to "force" and refuses to use the latter. Niebuhr argues that Dewey is the victim of a "scientist" illusion.<sup>17</sup> In this type of illusion, the scientific method employed in physics or biology is effective because it highlights human progress in the control of natural phenomena obtained through this method. If this is true historically for the application of this method in the pure sciences, it is wrong for Dewey to place such hope and faith in its application in the social and political fields.

Without revisiting the opposition between faith and reason that Niebuhr advances<sup>18</sup> and that Dewey disputes, it is understandable that Niebuhr criticizes the "faith" that Dewey puts into scientific reasoning. Niebuhr argues that science is not outside the realm of politics, and therefore it is naive to think that science can escape political conflicts of interest. Scientific techniques will be appropriated by the powerful of this world before serving the marginalized. If the experimental

method advocated by Dewey in the service of a social agenda could so easily succeed in supporting science against religious traditionalism, this will not be the case in the field of politics, which is subject to conflicts between different interests.

Denying Dewey the right to oppose force with intelligence constitutes the first step of Niebuhr's criticism. Indeed, he challenges the idea that science, by sweeping away the diversity of interests involved, can solve all political problems in the same way as it can for technical problems. Class interests conditioned the "method of intelligence" advocated by Dewey.<sup>19</sup> This criticism allowed Niebuhr, engaged in defending workers' rights, to disqualify Dewey in 1933 and 1934 as a defender of the oppressed by declaring him incapable, theoretically and practically, of taking over the political conflict. Thus, for Niebuhr, this denial of conflict in Dewey's political philosophy leads to practical ineffectiveness in politics. This first critique attacks Dewey in terms of his political philosophy.

## 2/ Aaron Schutz's Criticism

Moreover, Niebuhr's criticism is not isolated. On the contrary, Schutz's argument further develops Niebuhr's critiques. Indeed, it is not the fact that Dewey's non-conflictual theory of democracy is ineffective in its practice, but rather that such a theory is a "dangerous fantasy" with regard to his pedagogy.<sup>20</sup>

Without summarizing Schutz's entire analysis, let us simply observe that he examines progressive democrats' conviction for social transformation through education and the limits of this conviction. By comparing the political theory of these democrats, of which Dewey is a member, with that of the more militant theory of Saul Alinsky, Schutz finds that the educational philosophy of democrats does not take into account the notion of conflict for ideological reasons. Education promoted by progressive democrats focuses on interaction in small groups, fostered in an egalitarian framework that promotes individual expression. This pedagogy promotion of a peer-to-peer relationship does not allow for the expanded solidarity that is essential to the workers' or trade unions' movements that goes beyond this relationship.

However, by failing to prepare students for this conflict during their educational development, these teachers leave their students at a loss, once they become adults, in the face of often conflicting political problems. Indeed, at the heart of the Chicago Laboratory School, founded by Dewey, there is a greater emphasis on cooperation and sharing among students. Moreover, the social dialogue in this context inadequately prepares privileged students for the violence of disputes between adults. These children are not aware of their privilege because they have never experienced an interaction with those who are less privileged than they are, so they are not really capable of preparing for future political conflicts. The definitive remark on the subject goes to Katherine Camp Mayhew and Anna Camp Edwards when they note that "society brings both shock and conflict to a young person [. . .] trained [to collaborate]. . . . His attempts to use intelligent action for

social purposes are thwarted and balked by the competitive antisocial spirit and dominant selfishness in society as it is."<sup>21</sup>

But Schutz's argument is more precise than simply a critique of Dewey's educational philosophy. According to Schutz, the analogy Dewey makes between the organization of the public in a controlled and peaceful classroom and the organization of the public in an adult political conflict does not apply because it ignores the reality of power within human political interactions.<sup>22</sup> The so-called "balance of forces" or "reality of power" indicates the influence and importance of personal interests on the construction of a common interest. Schutz does not mean that the common interest is a political fiction reassuring the middle class, but it is clear from his criticisms that basing public education only on the slow construction of this common interest is overly idealistic. This last adjective is clearly pejorative and synonymous with failure and disillusionment for those citizens raised by democratic educators. Without experiencing a confrontation with power relations, the pedagogical resources of pragmatic education will only have a limited political impact on the social and democratic transformation that they advocate.

Schutz's criticism is effective for at least three reasons. First, it has a broad scope in considering the two political and pedagogical sides of Dewey's work. Here pedagogues cannot come to the rescue of political philosophers, and vice versa, to defend Dewey's theory of democracy. Advocating for conflict-free education for a future society without conflict cannot be effective in a society where preexisting conflicts exist. Second, Schutz's criticism is based on a conceptual study internal to Dewey's work where the notion of power, which explains the conflict of particular interests, is hardly present. Finally, Schutz's criticism resonates with a certain historical reality in which the progressive democrats failed to achieve political power in the United States at the end of the nineteenth century by rallying poor or racialized minorities to strive to overcome their social struggles. The history of the United States during this second half of the nineteenth century can be read as a continuation of the failure of the Democratic Party to establish a significant balance of power before their negotiations with industry employers.<sup>23</sup>

For Schutz, for example, this lack of attention to conflict in Dewey's philosophy of education results in a misplaced political hope in his pedagogy. This second critique, based on his philosophy of education, complements the first critique, which is more oriented toward Dewey's political philosophy and covers the whole field of his thinking on this issue.

In light of these criticisms, the most effective avenue of response is still to make it clear what the role of conflict is in Dewey's theory. Indeed, two elements demonstrate that Dewey is aware of the denunciations he has received regarding this point. First, there is the April 25, 1934, article in the *New Republic* entitled "Intelligence and Power."<sup>24</sup> This is a direct response to Niebuhr, who is quoted therein. Second, Dewey's correspondence clarifies his irritation with these criticisms. For

example, he wrote in 1946 to Joseph Ratner that “[Raphael] Demos in a recent review, *Yale Review*, speaks of my ‘rosy harmonies’ and my ‘denial of essential disharmonies and conflicts’” (October 11, 1946).<sup>25</sup> In his responses to these criticisms, Dewey gives a place to the notion of conflict, which can be divided into three points: (1) conflict plays a role in the formation of the public as class struggle, (2) conflict is an indispensable dimension of thought because it triggers the problem that is at the heart of any inquiry, and (3) conflict is necessary for the construction of a creative compromise, in particular for the deliberation of values. Let us study each of these individual roles given to the notion of conflict.

## II/ WHAT IS THE USE OF CONFLICT IN DEWEY'S THEORY?

Against these readings of Reinhold Niebuhr and Aaron Schutz, we want to argue that conflict is indispensable within the theory of democratic inquiry. Indeed, in order to understand this theory of inquiry and its validity in the search for knowledge, as well as for challenging social and political confrontations, conflict cannot be ignored, as Dewey recognizes its necessity in the context of public education. In addition, the natural presence of conflict is perceived through a Hegelian lens as a moment or a tool of the investigative method. Finally, in terms of Dewey's democratic project, this method explains the essential presence of conflict within political confrontations.

### 1/ Is Conflict Essential for Public Training?

To answer this question, the first reasonable thing to say is that Dewey does not at any time challenge the idea of class struggle in human history. A close reading of *Democracy and Education* shows that this idea is present in the structure of society that education might be seen to transform.

In Chapters 19 to 26, we observe an analysis that divides society into two classes and from this division emerges many dualisms marking education. The ruling classes oppose the lower classes, creating subclasses of employers between employees. These, in turn, create an educated class and an uneducated class, which then creates an opposition between leisure classes and working classes, and so on. Dewey points out the exploitation of power relations everywhere and sees this as a powerful obstacle to the advent of democracy through transformative education. Indeed, the opposition of particular interests produces more of an immobilism or deterioration of the situation (political, economic, etc.) than an intelligent evolution of the situation. But if the analysis of this class struggle were subtler in Dewey's work than in that of Marx, it is not as neglected as Niebuhr would have us believe.

In particular, in *The Public and Its Problems*, class struggle creates an oppressive environment, which must be distinguished from the growing industrialization process of the nineteenth century.<sup>26</sup> But where Dewey goes further than Marx is by adopting in part a Spencerian reading of human history; Dewey sees conflict as a

constant in the evolution of human societies. At every stage of humanity, conflicts have fueled technological, scientific, and cultural changes in different societies. From early confrontations between hunter-gatherers and early farmers, to the lessons of the First World War, Dewey says that “Everywhere in life there is conflict of the old and traditional with the new, and resultant confusion. This conflict is nowhere more acute than in education, and nowhere are the consequences of confusion more harmful.”<sup>27</sup> This conflict is a driving force for progress because it calls on societies to organize themselves to resolve it. In this sense, conflict has a role in shaping the public. It is an essential element of the public’s recognition of itself and of forming against and developing animosity toward other publics. Recognizing the fact that someone can have common interests with other individuals is not easy, and recognizing that those interests are sometimes opposed to the interests of other individuals can help a person identify those with whom he or she can associate. Conflict with a given public would then be what would allow that public to form itself. In this sense, Dewey responds to Schutz’s criticism because the latter affirms the educational significance of the conflict, and thus its pedagogical importance. However, conflict remains a limited tool; it confines the pooling of special interests to a level where an “opposing” audience is necessary for the formation of “my” public.

The assertion of this argument has an important consequence: for Dewey, to advocate for an experimental and pragmatic policy does not mean to deny the conflict between the interests of the different classes; on the contrary, it means that the interests of the dominated classes must drive social change. The dominant class is necessarily the one that has the greatest interest in maintaining the legacy of the past, which is considered indispensable. It will resist what appears to be new, that is, any ideology that does not advance the situation in the direction of a new common interest, different from its first established interest. Thus, if an elite class, a powerful minority, possesses the majority of the means of production and refuses to change social organization in favor of all (for example, by increasing salaries at a time when the cost of living is also rising), it is, according to Dewey, legitimate to use force against it: “A minority refuses by force to permit the method of intelligent action to go into effect. Then force may be intelligently employed to subdue and disarm the recalcitrant minority.”<sup>28</sup>

The intelligent use of force reveals the importance of the notion of conflict but also circumscribes it.<sup>29</sup> What Dewey wants to underline, to respond to the dualism that Niebuhr wants him to endorse between strength and intelligence, is that under no circumstances is violent and armed struggle absolutely necessary according to any historical dogmatism. Violent struggle is a possibility, but not an ontological necessity. The conflict, as we shall see later on, loses its value when it is resolved in violence. This violence has the effect of “freezing” the public in its interests and preventing it from associating with other publics. On the other hand, intelligence assures the

“plasticity” of audiences, allowing them to associate themselves with the interests of other publics. Thus, the promise of progress that lies in conflict is the correlate of its power to educate the public, but on the *sine qua non* condition of intelligent action by the public in its asserting its claims. The fruitfulness of conflict is therefore measured by the intelligence of the stakeholders involved and how they understand it.

## 2/ Engagement with Conflict as an Indispensable Tool for Dialectical Thought

The secondary status that Dewey gives to the notion of conflict explains the relationship that our first response indicates between intelligence and conflict. Indeed, in order to answer this last question, we must take a step back from Dewey's political theory and return to his theory of knowledge, because it is also within this theory that Dewey will give an indispensable place to the notion of conflict.

To be clear, in his *Logic* Dewey will propose a reconstruction of psychology that associates the logic of inquiry with the very process of thought. This process then finds its point of emergence in problematic situations. That is, what explains the emergence of thought within a subject is primarily the existence of a conflict between the subject and his or her environment. This original conflict will turn Dewey's logic into a way of thinking about the elimination of this conflict, that is, the construction and resolution of the Problem it generates.

In addition, the Hegelian origin of this notion is worth mentioning in terms of overcoming the conflict. Mead and then Thayer formulated for the first time a hypothesis, inspired by Hegel's work, doubly justifying the interactionism of the logic of inquiry and the design of the Problem:<sup>30</sup>

For Dewey the process of inquiry does not issue in some universal state of consciousness and truth. A specific problem generates and determines the course of thought and circumscribes its conclusions (. . .) nonetheless (. . .) each individual inquiry is like a little Hegelian universe; an evolutionary struggle of consciousness against 'otherness' proceeding through moments and 'forms' (Gestalten) to a unified concrete whole, self-realization and truth; thought mediating existence.<sup>31</sup>

Here Thayer points out the fact that the objects that constitute the material of inquiry do not appear freely or randomly to the inquirers' conscience. On the contrary, their emergence is coordinated by the Problem or “difficulty” to which the subject is exposed. The Problem is therefore not only what feeds the inquiry, but also what triggers it, and in this way it engages the subject in a dialectic between him or her and his or her environment. The conflict between the subject and his or her environment can take many forms, from hunger and thirst to the artist's intimate need to express what he or she feels in a complex personal situation.<sup>32</sup> This is what Thayer suggests to all evolutionary mental processes, whether they belong to the realm of science, nature, history, or social interaction.

It is in this way that Dewey traces the evolution of Hegel's thought in his course on the *Philosophy of the Spirit* of 1897. Dewey makes the concept of the Problem a central facet of Hegelian philosophy in three ways. First of all, the starting point of his philosophy, the relationship between unity and diversity, is a problem: "His original problem" was the driving force behind all of his work.<sup>33</sup> For Dewey, Hegel's philosophical production is the first proof of the importance of the Problem in thought. Second, the importance of the Problem is not specific to Hegel's mind; indeed Kant, Fichte, and Schelling were all motivated in their philosophical productions by the resolution of a Problem, a "resistance," a contradiction.<sup>34</sup> The Problem is therefore what causes all subsequent human thoughts. Finally, Dewey's overview of dialectics creates a conceptual role that is specific to the Problem itself. How else can scholars explain the articulation of the idea that a "spirit is absolute unrest,"<sup>35</sup> is always interested ("we attend only to that which interests us"),<sup>36</sup> is a desire that causes consciousness,<sup>37</sup> and finally is a "process of restoration"?<sup>38</sup> The conflict at the heart of the Problem is also what triggers both the work of the mind, the dialectical process, and the emergence of consciousness. It should also be noted that if the Problem is at the origin of the inquiry and the theory of knowledge, and if this theory must be totally coherent, then the purpose of thought is to solve the Problem being encountered so that the subject thinks in order to no longer think.<sup>39</sup> Dewey also noted this point in 1897 when he studied Hegel's philosophy of spirit: "suppression of thought is the fundamental principle of thinking."<sup>40</sup>

Thus, in making the thought process of the Problem central to his *Logic*, Dewey places conflict at the center of creative thinking. Indeed, overcoming Problems means a "positive" resolution of the conflict, which is neither a destruction of the environment nor a total alienation of the subject. On the contrary, the intelligence promoted by this first hypothesis is what determines the quality of the subject's adaptation to his or her conflict. Intelligence, understood here as the degree of creative adaptation of the individual to his or her environment, can also be understood on a collective and social dimension. The conflict will no longer reside between a subject and an environment, but between several individuals and publics. The question, then, is, can the individual problematic inquiry schema be transposed to that of the social inquiry proposed by Dewey?

### 3/ The Fertility of a Conflict within Social Struggles

Now that we have identified the role of conflict in individual inquiry, we can question the relevance of a transposition of conflict for social struggles. This interrogation is not in vain, and Dewey himself is well aware of it: "the Hegelian emphasis upon continuity and the function of conflict after my earlier confidence in dialectic had given way to skepticism."<sup>41</sup>

The implication of the previous answer is that the quality of the Problem to be solved by the individuals conducting asocial inquiry depends on their attitude

toward the conflict in question. The importance of conflict in a disagreeable situation would then be what constitutes its problematicity, that is, the degree of complexity necessary for an “organized, intelligent” attitude to resolve it.<sup>42</sup> This observation is what emerges from the conferences of 1935, synthesized three years later in the book *Liberalism and Social Action*. Thus, it will depend on Dewey’s 1939 work, compiled under the title *Theory of Valuation*, to continue this reflection in the field of ethics. Thus, Dewey responds to Niebuhr’s criticism because working through the conflict via inquiry does not “guarantee” anything for Dewey, contrary to Niebuhr’s assertion, but it offers an opportunity to build a mutually beneficial compromise. The compromise is therefore not a scientific ideal for Dewey, but rather a result to be researched together.

Conflict will become a necessary dynamic for individual ethical deliberation. This method focuses on the values that will condition the choice of hypotheses for solving the Problem. The compromise that is supposed to emerge from such deliberation would then depend on the attitude toward the conflict between stakeholders. Thus conflict is necessary for the construction of a creative compromise, in particular for the deliberation of values. This gives conflict a positive status as a spark for the evaluation process. If the protagonists’ state of emotional and lived conflict is rather negative, it is by “the institution of ends and values” that can eradicate the conditions that generate conflict.<sup>43</sup> This will then allow its positivity to emerge.

Therefore, compromise cannot really be established by force. On the contrary, such a resolution would only assert preexisting domination or return to it. Thus the justification of violence is complex and requires, precisely, a mobilization of particular intelligence.<sup>44</sup> The intelligence of conflict resolution that deliberation must address is the ability of stakeholders to establish common interests, not to triumph over one of the two competing interests. This means that the compromise builds a common interest, which is not naturally preexisting, but which is produced during the conflict. Thus compromise is defined by this intelligent search for the common interest beyond particular interests. Without conflict, individuals would not be able to perceive the benefit of the common interest over particular interests. This production then requires techniques that can be described as democratic. It is in this sense that we can hear Dewey’s invitation in his essay “Creative Democracy” to think of democracy as an opportunity for pedagogical knowledge about conflict.<sup>45</sup>

### III/ THE FUNDAMENTAL ROLE OF CONFLICT IN EDUCATION THEORY

Having observed the political side of Dewey’s thought processes, we must now study the educational side in order to have a global perspective on Dewey’s response to his critics. Here, too, conflict has an essential role because it is an indispensable component of an educational system that should seek to train the student in the

use of real democratic skills. It is through conflict that students can understand and learn the essential qualities for engaging in discussions and cooperation. This is why a pedagogy of compromise that does not avoid conflict but instead places conflict at the core of its educational practices would be indispensable for Dewey's school of tomorrow.

### 1/ A Core Element of Democratic Education

From the "Creative Democracy" speech, one quotation can provide clues about the need for conflict pedagogy within John Dewey's political and general theory of democracy:

A genuinely democratic faith in peace is faith in the possibility of conducting disputes, controversies and conflicts as cooperative undertakings in which both parties learn by giving the other a chance to express itself.<sup>46</sup>

The importance of consensus, cooperation, even brotherhood in Dewey's philosophy of education has often been highlighted, but rarely regarding the need for conflict between students, between students and teachers, or between teachers, within this pedagogy. However, if Niebuhr's or Schutz's criticisms of the failures of Dewey's pedagogy are to be answered in a practical way, this element must not be overlooked. The civic education that the school can provide to students is a process in which students must experience the conflict. Constructing and supervising the conflict then requires that a pedagogical framework should be overseen by the teacher where "disputes" and "controversies" can emerge between students.

In Dewey's book *Democracy and Education*, the traditional school is subjected to a subtle but continuous line of criticism, which consists in reproaching its lack of consideration for the conflict. Indeed, a monolithic truth suppresses any desire of opportunity to open up a discussion. A sovereign and immutable authority, embodied by the State or the figure of the "master," prevents any reconsideration of its power and possible antagonistic orientations. Moreover, the choice to adopt only one method of work or study in a given discipline discourages any possible conflict between students and the scientific approach in question. Finally, even more radically, Dewey criticizes traditional education for valuing competition between students that undermines conflict. Indeed, by creating an axiological asymmetry between the "good" and "bad" students, this type of education prevents the "bad" students from contradicting or starting an argument with the "good" students because they will feel inferior and unworthy of this "transaction" before it even begins. Thus, it is not surprising that the social order reproduced by this type of education makes it difficult for creative conflict between the oppressed classes and the oppressing classes to occur, and almost obliges the conflict to be reduced to violent interactions.

To respond to this lack of conflict, which imposes a preexisting order rather than building a "common" one, Dewey wants to think of the production of conflict within his pedagogy. The former should not owe anything to chance improvisation

or artificial systematization, but is included within the “method of intelligence” that is scientific and collective inquiry. Thus, “to claim that intelligence is a better method than its alternatives, authority, imitation, caprice and ignorance, prejudice and passion, is hardly an excessive claim.”<sup>47</sup>

In this way, teaching the ability to successfully lead a conflict requires two groups of bad habits of interaction to emerge from the discussion. The first group, “authority, imitation, caprice,” denies the existence of conflict as a source of meaning. The authorities see the conflict as nothing more than a phenomenon of disorder and insubordination that must be suppressed as soon as possible. Imitation as a factor of education excludes the conflict, which criticizes the proposed “model” and prefers fascination without criticism of the imitated model. Finally, caprice denies the productivity of conflict because, while it is necessarily an intersubjective social construct, caprice remains a solitary and unjustifiable choice for others. The second group, “ignorance, prejudice and passion,” on the other hand, includes all the teaching postures that are content with conflict without seeking to overcome it in the production of common interests. In fact, ignorance a priori prevents a group from leading a conflict to its resolution because it does not maintain a dynamic with knowledge acquisition in a given domain. Prejudices also confine themselves to a conflict between different preexisting positions and do not pretend to emerge from this sterile conflict. Finally, passion is also satisfied with a conflict, often leading to violence or, at the very least, an end to the exchange of arguments that can fuel the conflict. If there are too many emotion-based arguments present in a conflict, then the pursuit of the common good tends to be neglected. In fact, Addams confirmed this when she wrote to John Dewey on October 9, 1894,

Antagonism never lies in the objective differences, which always grow into unity if left alone, but arises when a person mixes into reality his own personal reactions. [. . .] When one gives extra emphasis to a part of the truth, [. . .] or when one feels that he must prove he is not a moral coward, and in a number of other ways, then emotion, not reality, produces conflict.<sup>48</sup>

Thus, if democracy is based on the conviction that common problems are best solved together rather than individually, it cannot be effective without the need to research the common interest in solving the problems in question. The task of the school is not to advocate a preexisting, nonconflictual state (often supported by a questionable metaphysical or religious order) or a conflictual state that is also preexisting and unassailable (whose justification is as doubtful as it is heraclitean), but to make the conflict a tool so that the child can conceive the necessity of overcoming it through discussion. Therefore, Dewey cannot consciously exclude the importance of conflict in public education. On the contrary, the child must learn the value of conflict from a search for a common good in compromise. Or to put it in Jane Addams’s words,

That the good must be extended to all of society before it can be held secure by any one person or any one class; but we have not yet learned to add to that statement, that unless all men and all classes contribute to a good, we cannot even be sure that it is worth having.<sup>49</sup>

## 2/ A Pedagogy Based on Conflict and in Favor of Compromise

How can groups apply Dewey's theoretical considerations in practice and make conflict a pedagogical element? Long before Célestin Freinet, Paulo Freire, or Ferdinand Oury, or more recently Galichet,<sup>50</sup> Forestal,<sup>51</sup> and Lefranc<sup>52</sup> within Francophone reflections on national education, Dewey described this pedagogy of compromise within his theory of education. For him, it is a question of including conflict in the experimental and scientific approaches to learning. Conflict is an essential link between the experimental and social aspects of this process. Several masters and students have carried out the social inquiry that defines this process, and, scientifically, its hypotheses are as much a test as an opportunity for conflict about their choices. Or, to put it differently, conflict is precisely what prevents the method of inquiry from being automatic or a mere mechanical technique.

There are three essential elements for this pedagogy: (1) the teacher must transmit to his students the conviction that the conflict can be overcome; (2) this overcoming is of greater common interest than all existing private interests; and (3) each object with a private interest for several students is therefore subject to a conflict and a resolution. These three convictions are not easy to transmit, and in the moment teachers often prefer to transmit the conviction to students that certain things (scientific truths, natural laws, internal rules) are not "discussed." Or that "common interests" in certain fields such as politics, art, or religion are only the result of a vast conspiracy from a few dominant parties acting in the shadows. Moreover, the social homogeneity of some schools can create privileged environments where children remain unconscious of their privileges and, in the end, are unable to understand a peaceful conflict with less privileged people.

Nevertheless, we can propose here some didactic-related suggestions to concretely implement such a pedagogy. First, in the continuous logic of Dewey's education, this pedagogy would have to be adopted by means of specific didactics for each age group of students. For instance, a theoretical conflict could arise due to a choice made among several training sessions proposed by the gymnastics teacher for primary school students. In this way, the students would experience a conflict in concrete terms, but also within a framework secured by the adult authority of the gymnastics teacher. At the secondary school level, a biology teacher could give up the only explanation of man's appearance on Earth to confront several theories and open a debate on the merits of these hypotheses. This would be an opportunity to apply Deweyan inquiry to illustrate that several solutions to a problem are possible and that conflict between these hypotheses can be a source of reflections beyond

it. Thus, a certain pluralism of possibilities would be understood even within the disciplines that seem to be the most "exact." At the end of high school, a deliberation on the importance of religion could start a course in moral and civic education. Again, this would be an opportunity to engage in a values conflict that highlights the social and cultural differences of students. The conflict would then have a creative dimension of transcending privileges depending on the history of a culture in a given country. Finally, in higher education, the university's *disputatio* could inspire many pedagogical ways to benefit from a more lively interaction with students in a lecture. Conflicts both identify the differences in each student's interests and provide a framework within which a community could develop. All these suggestions are, of course, only drafts whose relevance requires fundamental work in the educational sciences. Nevertheless, they allow us to see that many ideas can still emerge from the study of Dewey's educational philosophy, which, far from being outdated at present, can still open up unexplored methods for our systems of education.

## CONCLUSION

In view of the evidence of the defended proposal, "Students must be educated about conflict in order to prepare them for future conflicts," one may be surprised by the arguments set out in this article. However, it is by seriously considering Schutz's and Niebuhr's criticisms that the full extent and importance of the notion of conflict within Dewey's thinking can be explored. Explicating the criticisms of two of his major detractors demonstrates that neither Dewey's political philosophy nor his philosophy of education can remain valid without the notion of conflict. Conflict can only be a valid pedagogical tool if it is understood as a political reality. At the same time, as a political reality, it can only be surpassed via compromise if children are educated about the possibility of conflict resolution. It is this interaction between politics and pedagogy that lies at the heart of this notion that the three uses of conflict in Dewey's work exemplify. This is why skipping these steps would have been doubly damaging.

Indeed, in France, educational philosophers tend to view Dewey as a teacher of cooperation with optimistic and naive views regarding the attitude of children toward mutual assistance and solidarity. Nothing could be further from the truth, because this cooperation is not automatic for him and is always an attitude that must be produced, legitimized, and made necessary by the situation in the eyes of the child. Moreover, neglecting the importance of conflict is equivalent to turning the method of inquiry into a simple technique whose quality resides exclusively in its application. The inquiry in Dewey's eyes is of value only because it mobilizes the intelligence necessary to resolve the conflict being presented. Without it, the dynamics of the inquiry become meaningless. During a time in which conflicts contaminate political reality and history, nothing seems more urgent than to explore Dewey's work in order to forge a pedagogy that does not deny the difficulty nor the necessity of the quest for a compromise.

## NOTES

1. J.-H. Schneider, "John Dewey in France," *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 19, no. 1–2 (2000): 69–82.
2. S. Oliverio, M. Striano, and L. J. Waks, "Democracy and Education and Europe: A Century-Long Exchange," *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy* VIII (2016): 5.
3. M. Fabre, *Éducation et humanisme: lecture de John Dewey* (Paris: Vrin, 2015); J. Zask, *L'opinion Publique et Son Double*. Collection La Philosophie en Commun (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1999).
4. E. Renault, «Dewey, Hook et Mao: quelques affinités entre marxisme et pragmatisme. Dewey, Hook, Mao: On Some Affinities between Marxism and Pragmatism.» *Actuel Marx*, no. 54 (2013); N. Fraser, "Who Counts? Dilemmas of Justice in a Postwestphalian World," *Antipode* 41, no. s1 (2010): 281–297.
5. R. Horwitz, Article *John Dewey*, dans *Histoire de la philosophie politique*, sous la direction de Léo Strauss et de Joseph Cropsey (PUF, collection Quadrige, 1999).
6. J. Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*, in *John Dewey: MW 14*, 207.
7. L. Ménand, *The Metaphysical Club* (Glasgow: HarperCollins, 2001), 306.
8. *Ibid.*, 299.
9. J. Martin, *The Education of John Dewey: A Biography* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 162.
10. D. R. Papke, *The Pullman Case: The Clash of Labor and Capital in Industrial America* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1999).
11. «She converted me internally» (Dewey, October 1894).
12. «The antagonism of institutions was always unreal; it was simply due to the injection of the personal attitude & reaction; & then instead of adding to the recognition of meaning, it delayed & distorted it» (Dewey, October 1894).
13. Ménand, 312.
14. For more details on this conversation, read Martin, *The Education of John Dewey*, 161–168.
15. R. Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics* (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1932), 8.
16. *Ibid.*
17. *Ibid.*, 12.
18. *Ibid.*, 123.
19. Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*, in *John Dewey: MW 14*, 164–170.
20. A. Schutz, «Power and Trust in the Public Realm: John Dewey, Saul Alinsky, and the Limits of Progressive Democratic Education,» *Educational Theory* 4, no. 61 (2011): 497.
21. K. C. Mayhew and A. C. Edwards, *The Dewey School: The Laboratory School of the University of Chicago, 1896–1903* (New York: D. Appleton-Century, 1936), 439.

22. Schutz, «Power and Trust in the Public Realm,” 498.

23. R. B. Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991).

24. Dewey, “Intelligence and Power,” *New Republic* 78, 25 April 1934, in *John Dewey: LW* 9, 107–111.

25. Dewey, *John Dewey to Joseph Ratner*, 1946.10.11 (07161), in *The Correspondence of John Dewey: III*.

26. Renault, «Dewey, Hook et Mao”; J. Cork, “John Dewey and Karl Marx,” in *John Dewey: Philosopher of Science and Freedom: A Symposium*, by Sidney Hook (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1967).

27. Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, in *John Dewey: LW* 2, 295.

28. Dewey, *Liberalism and Social Action*, in *John Dewey: LW* 11, 61.

29. Dewey, in *John Dewey: LW* 11, 259–260.

30. G. H. Mead, “Box 14, Folder 3, Philosophy 63, 100 Pages Numérotées de 1 à 50,” in *George Herbert Mead Papers 1855–1968*, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library (2014); S. H. Thayer, reviewed work: *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry. John Dewey, the Later Works, 1925–1953, Vol. 12*, by Jo Ann Boydston and Ernest Nagel. *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 24, no. 4 (1988).

31. Thayer, 527.

32. Dewey, *La formation des valeurs*, Ed. *Les empêcheurs de tourner en rond* (Paris: La Découverte). Trad. J. Dewey (1939), *Theory of Valuation*, in *John Dewey: LW* 13 (2011), 137.

33. Dewey, *Hegel's Philosophy of Spirit, Lectures by John Dewey*. University of Chicago, in *The Joseph Ratner Papers and Collection of John Dewey*, 349.

34. *Ibid.*, 347.

35. *Ibid.*, 351.

36. *Ibid.*, 372.

37. *Ibid.*, 369.

38. *Ibid.*, 352.

39. This point connects with many aspects of Dewey's philosophy, which “applies” his theory of knowledge, particularly within his institutional political philosophy. An institution, as a collective human construct whose necessity results from the public's demand for a resolution to a common “intellectual problem,” can still be criticized by the same public even when that institution fulfils its functions effectively, such as making the original Problem disappear. Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, in *John Dewey: LW* 2, 326–352.

40. Dewey, *Hegel's Philosophy of Spirit*, 335. This reading of the *Philosophy of Spirit* of 1897 becomes even more enlightened in the way of reading Hegel's *Science of Logic* in 1904. It is a question here of restoring this logic in psychological terms. Thus, the process of thought is no longer sought in ontological terms but

rather in psychological terms; see T. C. Dalton, “Dewey’s Hegelianism Reconsidered: Reclaiming the Lost Soul of Psychology,” *New Ideas in Psychology* 15, no. 1 (1997): 11. Dewey reconstructs the dialectical process within the inquiry process.

41. Jane Dewey, *Biography of John Dewey*, in *The Philosophy of John Dewey*, ed. Paul A. Schilpp (Chicago: Open Court, 1989), 18.

42. Dewey, *Intelligence and Morals*, in *John Dewey: MW* 4, 50.

43. Dewey, *La formation des valeurs*, 141.

44. “I limit myself to pointing out that at the present time serious differences in valuing are in fact treated as capable of settlement only by recourse to force and in so far the view in question has empirical support. This is the case in recourse to war between nations, and in less obvious and complete ways, in domestic disputes between groups and in conflict of classes. In international relations short of war, the view is practically taken in acceptance of an ultimate difference between ‘justiciable’ and ‘non-justiciable’ disputes.” Dewey, «Some Questions about Value,» in *The Later Works of John Dewey, 1925–1953, Volume 15: 1942–1948, Essays*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston and Larry Hickman (Charlottesville, VA: Southern Illinois University Press, 1944), vol. 35, 107.

45. Dewey, “Creative Democracy—The Task Before Us,” in *John Dewey: LW* 14 (1938).

46. *Ibid.*, 4.

47. Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, in *John Dewey: LW* 1, (1925), 394.

48. Martin, *The Education of John Dewey*, 165.

49. Jane Addams, *Democracy and Social Ethics* (New York: Macmillan, 1913), 219–220.

50. F. Galichet, *L’éducation à la citoyenneté* (Paris: Anthropos, 1998), 146.

51. C. Forestal, “La dynamique conflictuelle de l’éthique pour une compétence éthique en DLC,” *ELA. Revue de didactologie des langues-cultures et de lexiculturologie*, no. 145 (2007): 119.

52. Y. Lefranc, “La laïcité et l’appropriation de la langue-culture française. Quel enjeu philosophique? Quel dispositif didactique?,” *ELA. Revue de didactologie des langues-cultures et de lexiculturologie*, no. 145 (2007): 34.

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- . 1916. *Democracy and Education. An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education*, in *John Dewey: MW 9*.
- . 1922. *Human Nature and Conduct*, in *John Dewey: MW 14*.
- . 1925. *Experience and Nature*, in *John Dewey: LW 1*.
- . 1927. *The Public and Its Problems*, in *John Dewey: LW 2*.
- . 1934. "Intelligence and Power." *New Republic* 78, 25 April 1934, in *John Dewey: LW 9*.
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