

Philosophy, Democracy & Education: Reconstructing Dewey

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When it comes to the connections between philosophy, democracy and education we could hardly find a more rewarding philosopher than John Dewey. Not only does the quest for democracy animate the whole vast canvas of his work, but Dewey also has an abiding concern with both education and the social value of philosophy, which makes the intersection between philosophy, democracy and education Dewey's home ground. Nor is Dewey's work lacking in contemporary social relevance. His vision of the democratic society as one that is democratic throughout the whole of its social fabric, and which thereby supplies everyday life with greater opportunities for human fulfilment, remains vital today, when democratic societies are still popularly conceived of merely as those that enjoy a certain form of government. On the educational front, widespread advocacy of the basic need to promote thinking in education distantly echoes Dewey's claim that we educate to the extent that we develop the ability to think intelligently, education being for Dewey but a continuous reconstruction of experience which increases our ability to direct and control our lives. And Dewey's insistence that philosophy should assume a social responsibility equal to its calling and help us to deal with the major issues and problems of contemporary social life has never been more pressing in a world where social values are increasingly in danger of being reduced to a narrowly economic outlook, while philosophers, on the whole, still busy themselves with rather remote subject matter.¹

I will be exploring these themes in Dewey in the hope of encouraging those who are interested in the connections between philosophy and democracy to include him in their teaching program. In unashamedly Deweyan style, however, I will also be making some broad proposals for reconstructing Dewey's proposals about philosophy itself.

1. Democracy and Community

Dewey never thought of the machinery of government as central to democracy, and took questions as to the institutions of state as subsidiary to the broader and deeper issues of community that lie at the heart of his

conception of a democratic society. Indeed, for Dewey, the idea of democracy is coincident with that of community:

Regarded as an idea, democracy is not an alternative to other principles of associated life. It is the idea of community life itself. . . . Wherever there is conjoint activity whose consequences are appreciated as good by all singular persons who partake in it, and where the realization of the good is such as to effect the energetic desire and effort to sustain it in being just because it is a good shared by all, there is in so far a community. The clear consciousness of a communal life, in all its implications, constitutes the idea of democracy.²

This means that, as an ideal, democracy is nothing but a projection of those extant patterns of associated life that are characterized by joint and mutual effort which is sustained by common assent and undertaken for the good of all. In short, we can say that, for Dewey, a society is democratic to the extent to which its social institutions and forms of association encourage and sustain community.

Dewey's simple equation of democracy with community can be more carefully delineated in terms of a number of significant characteristics of Deweyan community that make for democracy. As Dewey understands it, community is a way of living in which a group of people is bound together by "mutually interpenetrating" interests, where "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".³ This means that each agent acts in ways that are congruent with the interests of others and which actively reflect and enhance them. As a result, community tends to achieve outcomes that are not only coherent, but maximally inclusive of individual interests as well.

Deweyan community is not authoritarian and hierarchical, with political or social policy made on high, and social and industrial decisions commanded down the line. Change within community is not directed from above, but is communicated in many directions by individuals, and both within and between all manner of social groupings; and reciprocally, as it were, it is shaped by the interests of all those who would feel its effects. This means that the members of a community, as Dewey conceives it, are actively involved in building community, and share responsibility for its growth and development. This is empowering. The constant adjustment of individuals to each other, and of social institutions and arrangements to continuing efforts to be inclusive of the

interests of all, liberates the powers of the individual. Thereby it provides opportunities for the development of distinctive capacities and individual contributions which themselves are a means to further growth, and it gives force to that tie between freedom and culture which is one of the great promises of democracy.⁴

In *Education and Democracy*, Dewey identifies two criteria for evaluating social life. These are, first, the extent to which society, within its various groupings, gives conscious expression to common interests rather than to the interests of the few, as well as to a full range of humanly significant interests rather than, say, a small range of narrowly economic ones; and secondly, the degree of free interplay and cooperation between groups, whereby the possibilities of socially cohesive development are enlarged.⁵ These criteria essentially gather together the characteristics of community identified above: that is to say, the maximization and cohesion of interests and the creative freedom of open interaction. And they are the same criteria that Dewey goes on to identify with the general conception of democracy:

The first signifies not only more numerous and more varied points of 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.⁶

It should be noted that for Dewey these two broad features of what he calls community are intimately connected to the traditional trio of democratic life: equality, liberty and fraternity. In fact, so far as Dewey is concerned, it is only insofar as these three notions have their grounding in community that they can have other than a sentimental, false and ultimately destructive meaning. Rightly perceived, equality, liberty and fraternity arise out of and are realized in those forms of relationship that constitute community, and so it is only within community that we can understand their concrete identity and effective meaning:

In its just connection with communal experience, fraternity is another name for the consciously appreciated goods which accrue from an association in which all share, and which give direction to the conduct of each. Liberty is that

secure release and fulfillment of personal potentialities which take place only in rich and manifold association with others: the power to be an individualized self making a distinctive contribution and enjoying in its own way the fruits of association. Equality denotes the unhampered share which each individual member of the community has in the consequences of associated action. . . . Equality does not signify that kind of mathematical or physical equivalence of which any one element may be substituted for another. It denotes effective regard for whatever is distinctive and unique in each, irrespective of physical and psychological inequalities. It is not a natural possession but is a fruit of the community when its action is directed by its character as a community.⁷

Community also involves communication. For Dewey, communal life is not just a matter of associated activity. It involves a consciousness of its consequences on the part of the participants, as well as a shared desire to sustain that activity for those ends. This is consciousness not merely as an individual awareness, but as a “social consciousness” in the sense of joint or mutual knowledge, which effectively implies both community and communication.⁸ Dewey insists upon the communal, public nature of knowledge, claiming that communication is indispensable to knowledge, while the idea of “knowledge cooped up in a private consciousness is a myth”. This is not only because objective knowledge relies upon record and communication, but also because “only by distribution can . . . knowledge be either obtained or tested”.⁹ Establishing and maintaining publicly available records, conducting open inquiry into matters of public interest and concern, developing the art of translating complex and technical information into readily intelligible forms, and improving the means of disseminating it widely—these are the kinds of communal and communicative acts that make for informed opinion, and for public consciousness in the sense of joint and common knowledge. For that reason, they are the marks of communication within a community that make for democracy.

In addition to this, Dewey claims that thought itself comes to fruition only through communication and that its realization is most complete when we think together in “face-to-face relationships by means of direct give and take” within the communal encounters of dialogue. Thought in its fullness is communal and dialogical, according to Dewey, and only through a desire for personal gain rather than public good is it converted into the private capital of the individual:

The problem of securing diffused and seminal intelligence can be solved only in the degree in which local communal life becomes a reality. Signs and

symbols, language, are the means of communication by which a fraternally shared experience is ushered in and sustained. But the winged words of conversation in immediate intercourse have a vital import lacking in the fixed and frozen words of written speech. . . Logic in its fulfillment recurs to the primitive sense of the word: dialogue. Ideas which are not communicated, shared, and reborn in expression are but soliloquy, and soliloquy is but broken and imperfect thought. It, like the acquisition of material wealth, marks a diversion of the wealth created by associated endeavor and exchange to private ends. It is more genteel, and it is called more noble. But there is no difference in kind.¹⁰

We can readily appreciate that thought finds its basis in dialogue when we reflect on the fact that, in everyday contexts—whether in our families or with our friends, in our workplaces or in public life—most of our thinking is undertaken not in isolation, but as part of conjoint activity. Dialogue is the vehicle for thought which carries much of the constructive, reflective and communicative burden of doing things together. In its various phases, it involves such things as stopping what we are doing in order to discuss problems or difficulties (that is, stopping to *think about* what we are doing), dealing with our disagreements, helping each other to interpret the troublesome actions and uncertain intentions of third parties, and helping to give each other guidance in deciding what to do when we are in doubt. As Dewey says, thinking does not occur through spontaneous combustion. It is a response to uncertainty, hesitation or doubt. We begin to think when there is some difficulty to be overcome, a problem to be solved, or questions to be answered, and we feel the need of a resolution.¹¹ While it is true enough that most of us are given to privately ruminating upon our problems and difficulties to some extent, dialogue is the basic means through which we resolve them.

Dialogue rather than monologue is the natural form of thought. Even when we turn to what Dewey dubs soliloquy, we do not merely keep our thoughts to ourselves. We *address ourselves* in a curious parallel to the actor's asides to an audience. Dewey is right to claim that these private interludes are imperfect. Lacking a proper interlocutor, they are linguistically derivative and incomplete. They beg for a respondent, someone who listens to what is said, and who offers advice or consolation. Little wonder that soliloquy so readily gives way to those even more obviously derivative episodes where we become our own interlocutor and converse inwardly with ourselves.

Finally, in speaking of democracy as community we need to keep in mind the connection that Dewey sees between communication and inquiry. Dewey

conceives of what he calls the “Great Community” as one in which an informed and articulate public has come to enjoy the consequences of associated life in expanding abundance, and it is precisely this Great Community which he envisages as giving robust expression to democracy, understood as “a life of free and enriching communion”. Democracy, says Dewey, “will have its consummation when free social inquiry is indissolubly wedded to the art of full and moving communication”.¹² The democratic public must be both articulate and informed, and an informed public is only possible when continuous, systematic, and freely conducted social inquiry is carried out and its results are effectively communicated throughout the society at large. Otherwise, says Dewey, “what passes as public opinion will be ‘opinion’ in its derogatory sense rather than truly public, no matter how widespread the opinion is.”¹³

It is important to notice that, as Dewey uses the term ‘public’ here, a public is something that has to be brought about. The achievement of a public requires an awareness of the arena of our common interests in connection with the multifarious consequences of our interactions. To the extent that we do not recognize our common interests in controlling the consequences of our interactions, but individuals or groups independently seek their own advantage, or to the extent that our interactions are manipulated by powerful interests for private gain, there is no public. In fact, in *The Public and its Problems*, Dewey was in part lamenting the eclipse of the public. Hence the need for social inquiry and communication. Without them, the public proper cannot be established. “Systematic and continuous inquiry into all the conditions which effect association and their dissemination,” says Dewey, “is the precondition of the creation of a true public”.¹⁴

2. Democracy and Education

Since Dewey’s social democracy is developed and sustained by those features of community described above, education will be geared to democracy to the extent that it emphasizes such things as open inquiry, dialogue and communication, cooperation, and active participation in a wide range of associated groups. While these are among the direct educational implications of Dewey’s conception of democracy, to be sure, it will be useful to explore the connections between democracy and education in greater depth.

Dewey defines education as “that reconstruction or reorganization of experience which adds to the meaning of experience, and which increases

ability to direct the course of subsequent experience".¹⁵ In a less formal tone, he tells us that education is growth.¹⁶ As a process of reconstruction, education is growth in that it involves an enlargement of the meaning of our experience and of the capacity to take charge of our lives. But education is also growth in terms of its aim. For the aim of education, according to Dewey, is nothing but to enlarge the capacity for further education—to enhance the capacity for growth. So education is growth in terms of its ends as well as its means.

Once we put the claim that education is growth together with the equation of democracy with community, we can see that, for Dewey, the relations between democracy and education must come down to those between community and growth. And that is just how Dewey's story goes. His story about the relations between democracy and education is one of community as the provision for abundant growth.

It will be convenient to begin with the necessity of community in the child's early encounters with the use of things. In discussing how experience becomes meaningful, Dewey claims that, contrary to empiricist psychology, we do not acquire meaning through the synthesis of sensory impressions, or anything of the kind. Rather, we attain meaning only as we come to intelligently and intentionally interact with the world around us. And this comes about through our involvement in communicative activities, and particularly through those episodes in which we learn about what Dewey loosely calls the "use of things". Let us look at these connections by means of an example:

If the mother hands the child something needed, the latter must reach for the thing in order to get it. Where there is giving there must be taking. The way the child handles the thing after it is got, the use to which it is put, is surely influenced by the fact that the child has watched the mother. When the child sees the parent looking for something, it is natural for it also to look for the object and to give it over when it finds it, as it was, under other circumstances, to receive it. . . [Such instances show] the part played in the joint activity by the use of things. . . But as a matter of fact, it is the characteristic use to which the thing is put, because of its specific qualities, which supplies the meaning with which it is identified. A chair is a thing which is put to one use; a table, a thing which employed for another purpose; an orange is a thing which costs so much, which is grown in warm climes, which is eaten, and when eaten has an agreeable odour and refreshing taste, etc.¹⁷

In our communicative interactions with children, particularly when we do things with objects and involve the children in the activity, we engage them in the making of meaning. This is how children learn about everything from tables and chairs to oranges and orangutans, as well as about the larger world of human action, and just about everything else. We bring them within the circle of communicative activity. Yet notice how smoothly we move from talking about the acquisition of meaning to speaking of the educative process. By engaging children in the making of meaning, we thereby educate them. And this is because education is the process of making experience meaningful.

For Dewey, all genuinely social acts are communicative, and all communication is educative. "To be a recipient of a communication is to have an enlarged and changed experience."¹⁸ This means that the reconstruction of experience is not, of course, confined to formal education. Formal education is but a deliberately organized part of a continuing process. Meaningful, educative experience permeates our lives to the extent that we are engaged in genuinely communicative, social activity. Yet it is as true today as when Dewey complained about it over eighty years ago, that so much nominally social activity is virtually meaningless, at least for many of its participants. On Dewey's analysis, this is basically because the activity is not communicative, or not even really shared, when those participating in the activity either cannot or do not enter into the enterprise with that common mind, that sense of common purpose, which belongs to community. Dewey's industrial examples may be a little dated in some respects, but they are still make the point very clear:

A pin may pass in the course of its manufacture through the hands of many persons. But each may do his part without knowing what the others do or without any reference to what they do; each may operate simply for the sake of a separate result—his own pay. There is, in this case, no common consequence to which the several acts are referred, and hence no genuine intercourse or association, in spite of juxtaposition, and in spite of the fact that their respective doings contribute to a single outcome. But if each views the consequences of his own acts as having a bearing upon what others are doing and takes into account the consequences of their behaviour upon himself, then there is a common mind; a common intent in behaviour. There is an understanding set up between the different contributors; and this common understanding controls the action of each.¹⁹

The mere contrivance of coordinated effort, without a shared sense of purpose among the participants, is socially unintelligent and humanly unrewarding. In a

word, it lacks the virtues of community. By contrast, when there is Deweyan communication, so that the members of a group operate under a common understanding, joint activity becomes genuinely social and meaningful. It comes within community.

By now the connections between growth and community—between education and democracy—have begun to surface. Community is a rich mixture of communication and activity directed towards common and interconnected interests, and hence it provides fertile ground for the growth of meaningful experience and of our capacity to direct its onward course. Just because community is such a rich source of growth, it is abundantly educational. And given that democracy is founded upon community, democracy shows itself to be a deeply educational form of life. Here again is Dewey:

[Democracy] 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 class, race, and national territory which kept men from perceiving the full import of their activity. These more numerous and 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.²⁰

We are now back in familiar territory, in that promised land of an ever broadening community of interest and a fuller and freer interplay that liberates our powers. Yet now we can see that democratic growth, the expansion of “conjoint communicated experience,” is the very process of education itself. From the viewpoint of process, democracy is education, in that the life of community is, above all others, the life of abundant and continuing growth in meaningful experience.

It makes little difference if we view this matter in terms of ends rather than means. Once we see the aim of education as the capacity for continuing growth, and ask what social arrangements would best answer to this aim, then we see that “this idea cannot be applied to *all* the members of society except where intercourse of man with man is mutual, and except where there is

adequate provision for the reconstruction of social habits and institutions by means of wide stimulation arising from equitably distributed interests. And this means a democratic society."²¹ Only those social arrangements which provide for free association, open communication, active inquiry, and unfettered social participation by all, could fulfil the aim of continuing growth—and only then provided that the society's established institutions are sufficiently flexible to respond to the many and continuous needs for change. To repeat, it is community which provides the basis for a continuing capacity for growth; and this is equivalent to saying that the aim of education finds its fulfilment in democracy.

In continuing the discussion about democracy and education, or community and growth, I would like to say something about the importance of inquiry in community, particularly as it relates to formal education. Dewey says that the move to democracy represents "the will to substitute the method of discussion for the method of coercion" in settling differences of opinion, but that this method has not yet run deep.²² While some such substitution has taken effect in political decision-making in many parts of the world, it has made relatively little gains in the home, school, or workplace, where authority and coercion still tend to reign. Speaking to Americans against the grim backdrop of fascism and totalitarianism and under the darkening skies of impending war in Europe, Dewey warns that conflict over democracy begins at home, within our own attitudes and institutions. In the end, this conflict "can be won only by extending the application of democratic methods, methods of consultation, persuasion, negotiation, communication, cooperative intelligence, in the task of making our own politics, industry, education, our culture generally, a servant and an evolving manifestation of democratic ideas".²³

Dewey sees continuity between these methods and those of science. Democratic decision-making, as he conceives of it, strives for a consensus through free-ranging inquiry into our different points of view. It seeks the relevant facts, employs publicly conspicuous processes, communicates its findings, and is always prepared to submit its working results to the challenge of further experience:

It is of the nature of science not so much to tolerate as to welcome diversity of opinion, while it insists that inquiry brings the evidence of observed facts to bear to effect a consensus of conclusions—and even then to hold the conclusion subject to what is ascertained and made public in further new inquiries. I would not claim that any existing democracy has ever made complete or adequate use of scientific method in deciding upon its policies.

But freedom of inquiry, toleration of diverse views, freedom of communication, the distribution of what is found out to every individual as the ultimate intellectual consumer, are involved in the democratic as in the scientific method.²⁴

Dewey traces the development of democracy to changes in our social and material circumstances resulting from the growth of science and technology; and, in arguing for the adaptation of scientific method to the problems of social life, he sees us as finally being able to throw off the shackles of the pre-scientific world view in which most of our social thinking is still confined.²⁵ In the handy phrase that Charles Sanders Peirce used to characterize the scientific community, Dewey's democratic community is very much envisaged as a community of inquiry.

Dewey particularly laments the fact that the methods of democracy are so sadly lacking where they are most in need of being taught—in the school education system:

That the schools have mostly been given to imparting information ready-made, along with teaching the tools of literacy, cannot be denied. The methods used in acquiring such information are not those which develop skill in inquiry and in test of opinions. On the contrary, they are positively hostile to it. They tend to dull native curiosity, and to load powers of observation and experimentation with such a mass of unrelated material that they do not operate as effectively as they do in many an illiterate person. The problem of the common schools in a democracy has reached only its first stage when they are provided for everybody. Until what shall be taught and how it is taught is settled upon the basis of formation of the scientific attitude, the so-called educational work of schools is a dangerously hit-and-miss affair as far as democracy is concerned.²⁶

One might see Dewey as having a scientific attitude to the problems of social life, and as here advocating the development of a corresponding outlook in school education. Yet this would be to mistake pragmatism for scientism. Roughly, the mistake would be to conflate the claim that we should look to the consequences of our ideas in judging their meaning or their worth with the view that the established sciences provide the measure of all meaning and value. Rather than embracing a narrow scientism, Dewey is warning us of the dangers of the manipulation of public opinion by media propaganda, and

reminding us of the influence on belief, attitude, and action of unargued authority, unthinking habit, unreflective sentiment, and sectional bias. And he is admonishing us to develop, through school education, a critical, inquiring and reflective citizenry, that is willing to suspend judgment, to put evidence before personal preference, and to treat ideas as hypotheses to be tested in experience rather than to be treated as dogma that it would be heretical or perfidious to question.

Dewey presents education and democracy as two sides of a golden coin. If this is to be more than a glowing vision, we need to see what its consequences might be for thinking about our own poor versions of community and our work-a-day educational institutions. If we believe that our educational institutions should not help merely to perpetuate existing social conditions, but should be a means of making them more democratic, then they must not be places where students are weighed down by the legacy of the past or indoctrinated with prevailing attitudes, beliefs and values. Instead, as Dewey says, we should establish in our schools “a projection in type of the society that we should like to realize, and by forming minds in accord with it gradually modify the larger and more recalcitrant features of adult society”. _ Insofar as we are talking about a projection of the democratic society, this means that we need to turn our schools into communities, in Dewey’s sense. Among other things, this would require that we foster communication among our students instead of isolating them from one another; that we engage them in open inquiry rather than simply teaching them by authority; that classroom activity and school life should expand students’ interests by building upon them; that schooling should build on cooperation and reciprocity of interest rather than focusing upon competition and social division; and that many and varied forms of association should be developed within the school, and between the school and the wider community, so as to enable children in groups and as individuals to develop socially intelligent attitudes and approaches to one another. In sum, we should do all that we can to turn schools into communities through which we can liberate the powers of those that inhabit them and develop their capacities for growth. If Dewey is right, then schools must practice the virtues of community if they are to project democracy and to provide the society at large with better prospects for progress in that direction.

3. Philosophy, Democracy and Education

So far we have been exploring Dewey’s conceptions of democracy and education through their connections with his notion of community. By this means, I have tried to persuade you that we ought to aspire to democratic forms of life because they maximize the prospects of growth. If we want rich

and fulfilling lives, lives that are meaningful and continue to grow, and if we want such lives not only for ourselves, but for all of our fellows, then we should march toward democracy under the banner of community.

It is finally time to ask what contribution philosophy may make to the pursuit of this democracy.²⁸ In the previous section I made the connection between what Dewey calls the “method of democracy” and scientific inquiry, and noted Dewey’s call for the development of a corresponding attitude as an organizing principle in school education. In this section, I proceed to draw attention to the connections that Dewey makes between this inquiring outlook and the need for a practically-minded philosophy, and go on to suggest that we can carry Dewey’s project forward by making philosophical inquiry an active ingredient in daily life. The kind of thing that I have in mind is best exemplified by recent attempts to set up communities of philosophical inquiry in our schools and classrooms. Another move would be to establish more inclusive forums for cultural dialogue in our communities, and across ethnic and sectarian divides. To the extent that such developments would add to the meaning of experience within community, philosophy would become both broadly educational and truly public. This would make philosophy continuous with both the means and the ends of democracy.

Dewey says that “the distinctive office, problems and subject matter of philosophy grow out of stresses and strains in the community life in which a given form of philosophy arises”.²⁹ Yet philosophy does not merely mirror the conditions from which it springs. It is also creative and socially transforming. Its pronouncements are “prophecies rather than records”; it is more concerned with the possibilities of meaning than with truth. Dewey sums this up rather grandly by saying that, while philosophy is “a conversion of such culture as exists into consciousness . . . this conversion is itself a further movement of civilization”.³⁰

This means that philosophy has deep historical and theoretical connections with education. Insofar as movements in civilization embody modifications of mental and moral attitudes, which it is the business of education to promote, and in as much as philosophy is “an explicit formulation of the problems of the formation of right mental and moral habitudes in respect to the difficulties of contemporary social life,” philosophy becomes but “the theory of education in its most general phases” and the “reconstruction of philosophy, of education, and of social ideals and methods thus go hand in hand”.³¹

If we ask what philosophical transformations would assist the passage from mere political democracy to the life of abundant community, Dewey's basic claim is that we must make philosophy practical. Once again, he begins with the consequences to be drawn from the earlier development of a scientific epistemology:

. . . in the actual course of the development of science, a tremendous change has come about. When the practice of knowledge ceased to be dialectical and became experimental, knowing became preoccupied with changes and the test of knowledge became the ability to bring about certain changes. Knowing, for the experimental sciences, means a certain kind of intelligently conducted doing; it ceases to be contemplative and becomes in a true sense practical. Now this implies that philosophy, unless it is to undergo a complete break with the authorized spirit of science, must also alter its nature. It must assume a practical nature; it must become operative and experimental.³²

The change in orientation required by an "operative and experimental" philosophy would mean either total abandonment of philosophy's former problems, or at least their radical reconstruction. Such a practically oriented approach would turn us away from endless disputes between realists and idealists, unproductive disagreements over the metaphysics of possible worlds, and the like, towards the more pressing problems of humanity. As Dewey rhetorically asks:

Would it not encourage philosophy to face the great social and moral defects and troubles from which humanity suffers, to concentrate its attention upon clearing up the causes and exact nature of these evils and upon developing a clear idea of better social possibilities; in short upon projecting an idea or ideal which, instead of expressing the notion of another world or some far-away unrealizable goal, would be used as a method of understanding and rectifying specific social ills?³³

If we go on to ask how this socially oriented philosophy might be developed in the quest for Dewey's Great Community, it is not entirely empty to suggest that its value would depend upon the extent to which it found a place in attempts to think through those problems and issues that bar the path to a more inclusive and liberating community. It is in the nature of such a community that everyone should share in its deliberations, to the extent of their capacity, and that the community should develop the individual's

capacities to the full. And given that community exists only to the extent that its members are able to participate fully and freely in it, it is clear that philosophical inquiry, in the context of community, should not be thought of as the exclusive prerogative of an educated elite, let alone of professional philosophers. Community makes reflection on how we should think and act, and involvement in social transformation, an inclusive affair.

The educational consequences of this line of thought are staggering. When we ask what kinds of reconstruction would fit philosophical inquiry for its role in community, we can see that they must be ones which make its processes educational and democratic. At least, this follows given the Deweyan ties between democracy, community, education and growth. To say that the processes must be educational means that philosophical inquiry should aim to enrich the ongoing experience of those individuals and groups undertaking it, and to develop those “mental and moral habitudes” that enable people to deal more intelligently with the problems and possibilities of social life. To say that its processes must be democratic means that they should involve open, cooperative, conjoint activity, centering upon face-to-face dialogue which takes as much account of everyone’s interests as possible, and comes to be sustained by the efforts of those involved because of a common conscious awareness of the benefit that it imparts.³⁴

While I cannot discuss concrete applications here, I should like to record that the educational enterprise to which I have just alluded is hardly untried. Without doubt, the most thorough-going attempt to set philosophy on this course was initiated some thirty years ago by Matthew Lipman under the name of ‘Philosophy for Children’. Lipman’s conception of philosophy within school education presents the classroom as a community of inquiry, and is as clear a case of the reconstruction of philosophy within community as one could hope to find.³⁵ In terms of the development of community groups, the influence of Habermas and critical theory might be mentioned. And whatever difficulties attend Habermas’ account of the ideal speech community, attempts to turn such work to good account amongst such groups as non-government organizations must be strongly welcomed.³⁶ Other groups with at least somewhat similar aims would include those based on Socratic dialogue, and groups stimulated by British physicist David Bohm’s work on dialogue.³⁷

No brief tour of the major sites and their connecting pathways can do justice to either the details or the totality of Dewey’s thought on democracy, philosophy and education. Still, we have seen enough to make it clear that Dewey has things to say on these matters which are of significant continuing social

importance, and that he should still occupy a place when it comes to the philosophy of democracy and our teaching programs. At the same time, we would fail to teach Dewey well if we thought that his continuing significance lies in merely comprehending his ideas. The deeper lesson to be learnt from Dewey is how to reconstruct them in ways that apply to contemporary social life. And that is a lesson we are just beginning to learn.

1. There has been a recent resurgence of interest in the American pragmatists, and in Dewey in particular. That the reasons for this are connected with the points made above is confirmed by more than one writer who has recently addressed the issue. See for example, Alan Ryan's *John Dewey and the High Tide of American Liberalism* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1995) and Robert B. Westbrook's *John Dewey and American Democracy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991). For wider reading exploring connections between contemporary pragmatism and Dewey and the other classical pragmatists, see H.O. Mounce, *The Two Pragmatisms* (New York: Routledge, 1997) and the recent anthologies, *Pragmatism: A Reader* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997), edited by Louis Menard, and *Pragmatism: A Contemporary Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1995), edited by Russell B. Goodman.

2. John Dewey, *The Public and its Problems* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1991), pp. 148-49.

3. John Dewey, *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education* (New York: Collier Macmillan, 1966), p. 87.

4. See Dewey's *Freedom and Culture* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1963) for an extended discussion of the importance of the interaction between the individual will and the social environment in the development of a truly democratic society, as against a totalitarian one.

5. *Democracy and Education*, p. 83.

6. *Ibid.*, pp. 86-87. Compare also the following passage: "In a search for the conditions under which the inchoate public now extant may function democratically, we may proceed from a statement of the nature of the democratic idea in its generic social sense. From the standpoint of the individual, it consists in having a responsible share according to capacity in forming and directing the activities of the groups to which one belongs and in participating according to need in the values which the groups sustain. From the standpoint of the groups, it demands liberation of the potentialities of members of a group in harmony with the interests and goods which are common. Since every individual is a member of many groups, this specification cannot be fulfilled except when different groups interact flexibly

and fully in connection with other groups.” (*The Public and its Problems*, p. 147.)

7. *The Public and its Problems*, p. 150.

8. If this understanding of consciousness is not readily familiar, it would not be altogether misleading to think of it as akin to the conception of consciousness attached to the once fashionable idea of the “consciousness raising” group.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 176.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 218.

11. John Dewey, *How We Think* (New York: D.C. Heath, 1933), p. 6.

12. *The Public and its Problems*, p. 184.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 177.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 218.

15. *Democracy and Education*, p. 76.

16. Aside from being appropriate to Dewey’s account of education as the continuous reconstruction of experience, the idea of education as growth also provides a proper contrast with other well-known conceptions of education with which Dewey finds fault. This includes the ideas of education as a preparation, as an unfolding of latent powers, as a training of mental faculties, as learning various subject matters, and as acquiring the heritage of the past.

17. *Ibid.*, pp. 28-29.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 30.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 87.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 100. It is important to emphasise the word ‘all’, as Dewey does here. Many societies have provided for the “mutual intercourse of man with man” amongst the members of a privileged class, and condemned the rest of the populace to servitude. They have simultaneously denied that multitude the possibility of growth in Dewey’s sense. On the other hand, as Dewey notes, the institutions and social arrangements that make for such divisions also tend to thwart the continuing growth of even its privileged members. To the extent that this is true, the aim of education cannot be met when such restrictions are

applied. Unless the benefits of community are extended to all, the prospects of continuing growth for even the privileged few are going to be diminished.

22. *Freedom and Culture*, p. 128ff.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 175.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 102.

25. For an extended discussion of the need for the reconstruction of our social and moral thinking along the path first traversed by science, see Dewey's *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, enlarged edition (Boston: Beacon Press, 1948). For Dewey's full treatment of the method of inquiry, see *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* (New York: Holt, 1938), and for an earlier and easy-going treatment see *How We Think*, revised edition (New York: D. C. Heath, 1933).

26. *Ibid.*, pp. 149-150.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 317. Discussion of the need for the school to provide a model of community life can be found in many other places in Dewey, most famously in *The School and Society*, reprinted in Philip W. Jackson (ed.), *The School and Society and the Child and the Curriculum* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956).

28. Many topics might be taken up in this connection with Dewey: Dewey's philosophy of "the common man", the philosophical reconstruction of social and moral thinking, the revitalized connections between democracy and pragmatism, or the need for philosophers to be involved in the problems of their day, to take obvious examples. My focus will be on the contribution that philosophy education can make to democracy.

29. John Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, 'Introduction: Reconstruction as Seen Twenty-Five Years Later.'

30. John Dewey, *Philosophy and Civilization* (New York: Minton, Balch & Company, 1931), pp. 7-10.

31. *Democracy and Education*, pp. 328-331.

32. *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, p. 121.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 124. This does not make philosophy a branch of social science, or a substitute for it, by the way. Rather, it is an attempt to think about our lives and the life of our societies so as to work out more clearly what kind of society we would want, and what lives we should live. 34. In saying these things, I am,

of course, merely reiterating Dewey's characterisations of education and democracy, and in the briefest of terms.

35. See Matthew Lipman, *Philosophy Goes to School* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988) and *Thinking in Education* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991) and the classroom programs discussed therein. See also my own *Thinking Together* (Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1995) and the *Thinking Stories* books in Hale & Iremonger's Children's Philosophy Series. It is also worth recording that UNESCO's Division of Philosophy and Ethics has recently begun a project on Philosophy for Children and Youth, in recognition of the concrete and effective opportunities it offers to make these connections between philosophy and democracy. UNESCO Philosophy for Children, Meeting of Experts, Paris, 26-27 March, 1998.

36. See Juergen Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action*, trans. T. McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984) and *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, trans. C. Lenhardt and S. W. Nicholsen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). On application to NGOs, see Rainier A. Ibana, *Six HGO Terminologies: Their Philosophical Contexts* (Manila: Ateneo Centre for Social Policy and Public Affairs, Ateneo de Manila University, 1994).

37. See David Bohm, *On Dialogue*, edited by Lee Nichol (London: Routledge, 1996).