Rescuing Dewey

Essays in Pragmatic Naturalism

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Introduction

There may be no philosopher who has provoked more books and articles than John Dewey, who, of course, may also have set a record in producing books and articles. (*The Collected Works,* now complete, number some thirty-seven volumes.) One wonders if anyone has read all of it. Indeed, one strategy, perhaps too frequently adopted, is to ignore all the critical literature and try to stick to his published texts—sometimes, not even to all of them! Nor, it may be supposed, is any philosopher less in need of "rescuing." He has been the subject of several biographies, including two excellent recent biographies and his name continues to reappear in all sorts of contexts. Moreover, Dewey's many critics ranged pretty much across the philosophical spectrum and, to be sure, there were plenty of sympathetic philosophers who responded to these critics. But the guiding idea in this volume is not to try to rescue Dewey from his critics (although that is sometimes also a consequence), but to rescue Dewey from his friends.

The friends that he needs rescuing from fall into two main groups. On the one hand, there are those who either play down or ignore the implications of Dewey's naturalism. For these philosophers, his version of pragmatism broke new ground precisely because it overcame the fundamental impasses of traditional metaphysics. Viewed from the perspective of academic philosophy, these philosophers have labored hard to preserve and extend Dewey's pragmatism as an original and distinct American philosophy. While still marginal in the academy, they have made many important contributions. Prominent in this group are philosophers who speak of Dewey's "metaphysics of experience."[1] For these philosophers, James's radical empiricism is often taken as Dewey's point of departure. These philosophers see rightly that Dewey rejected atomistic empiricist versions of experience and that, for him, experience

was rich and informing, and included not only "relations" of all sorts, but both "doings" and "sufferings." But as Tiles has recently remarked, while Dewey insisted that in his *Experience and Nature,* he sought to provide an "empirical naturalism" or a "naturalistic empiricism," he saw also that many philosophers would find these expressions to be oxymoronic, like "talking of a round square."

These philosophers take seriously the problem set out by Kant and hold, not without reason, that Dewey is suspicious of metaphysics in Kant's sense: claims about that which is not *in* experience. The problem here, as Ralph Barton Perry saw, was the slip into philosophical idealism. He argued: "It would appear that while Dewey . . . rescues reality from dependence on intellect, he is satisfied to leave it in the grasp of more universal experience which is 'a matter of functions and habits, of active adjustments and re-adjustments, of coordinations and activities,' rather than of states of consciousness" (Perry, 1955: 315). Some defenders of Dewey would, I think, also be satisfied. Perry was not, of course, since he persisted that "a thoroughgoing realism must assert independence not only of thought, but any variety whatsoever of *experience*, whether it be perception, feeling, or even the instinctive response of the organism to its environment" (315).[2]

There was something radical and important about insisting on the rejection of a "subject/object dichotomy" but on the usual terms, if existence is restricted to what can be experienced, it is hard to see how idealism is to be avoided. There is an alternative, a form of critical realism, which makes Kant's thing-in-itself knowable. That is, the *causes* of our experience cannot themselves be *in* experience. There is a real tension in Dewey on this, a tension examined in several of the papers in this volume. On the present view, the critical point is that, for Dewey, contrary to modern epistemology, the problem of the external world was not a problem—for good reason; but even so, there remained not only the question of the causal role of an independently existing nature, but as part of this, the causal role of the theoretical entities of science. For the whole of Dewey's long life, positivism was surely the unchallenged view on such matters (Manicas, 1989), and while recent pragmatic philosophies of science were not particularly influenced by Dewey, they have helped to promote the idea that Dewey could be enlisted in their cause. Thus, pragmatic philosophy of science rejects "realism" as an untenable and unnecessary metaphysical commitment. But this seems inconsistent with the actual practices of the successful sciences (Manicas, 2006). Thus, while it may seem obvious, we can only explain the rusting of iron if we have a theory that postulates the independent existence of Fe and which details the process called oxidation.

Similarly, while it is clear that Dewey was a powerful advocate of "the method of intelligence," and that plainly, the practices of the sciences were pertinent to seeing what was involved in this, these philosophers have tended to be uncritical of what might somewhat anachronistically be called Dewey's philosophy of science. Partly because Dewey wrote no explicit philosophy of science and partly because these philosophers have been rightly suspicious of Vienna-inspired Anglo-American philosophy of science, they have paid almost no attention to Dewey's original—but confusing—theory of science, including his vision of its role and relation in society. This is an important lacunae from the present point of view. Dewey is rightly associated with "science" and "scientific method," but neither idea can be taken for granted. For example, as Dewey made clear: the social sciences need to function in a democratic society, but as he insisted, "the prime condition of a democratically organized public *is a kind of knowledge and insight which does not yet exist*" (Dewey, 1954: 166; my emphasis). *Quest for Certainty* (1929) is hardly the key text for getting a handle on Dewey's theory of science. As it turns out, *Experience and Nature* (1934), *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* (1938), and many disparate essays are both far richer and much more clearly provide the main outlines of his distinctive views on the critical issues in philosophy of science.

These philosophers also see American pragmatism and especially Dewey as creating "an image of America" which made him a critical player in what has been termed the "reformist left." These writers may acknowledge Dewey's vision of a democratic society, but hold that, for him, problems in American society "could be corrected using the institutions of constitutional democracy": elect the right politicians and enact the right laws. Thus, he is seen as left-liberal who puts his trust in American exceptionalism: the history of the United States was moving progressively toward a distinct American vision. While it is true that Dewey rejected an insurrectionary politics and was no "fire-eating leftist," his analysis of the present was radical in the sense that it went straight to the roots. This put his politics close to Marx's in critical ways. The interpretation of Dewey as a left-reformist is best articulated by the second group of Dewey's "friends."

Rorty and those who follow him constitute this second group of friends from whom Dewey needs rescuing. Again, speaking from the point of view of academic philosophy, these philosophers are typically "Anglo-American analytic philosophers." While their style of philosophy has somewhat waned, it is fair to say that they continue to dominate academic philosophy in the United States, if less so in other places. A good deal of recent Dewey scholarship falls into this mode.

Rorty, of course, is key here. Himself a well-established analytic philosopher, his "discovery" of Dewey led him to a more general attack on the claims of philosophy. He was correct to insist that epistemology is a modern subdiscipline of philosophy generated by the problem of legitimating the claims of the new science (Rorty, 1979). And given this understanding of the history of Western philosophy, he was correct also to see strong parallels between Nietzsche, James, Heidegger, Derrida, and Foucault. Thus, contemporary "textualism," the idea that there is nothing but texts parallels the idealist notion that there is nothing but ideas (Rorty, 1982: 139). But there is, he insists, a critical difference between current textualism and classical idealism. In repudiating the tradition, textualists rejected the framework that allow for epistemology and ontology. Thus, unlike idealists (or naturalists or materialists) so-called "postmodern" writers reject the idea that what is important is not whether what we believe is true, but what "vocabulary we use." Finally, then, for Rorty, pragmatism joins postmodern thinking in repudiating metaphysical argument between idealist/naturalists and the epistemological idea of truth as correspondence with reality. But if Dewey was committed to naturalism, there would seem to be no escaping ontological commitments—including a naturalistic account of consciousness. Similarly, philosophical realists—as most ordinary people, believe that true *means* "correspondence with reality." But even if one assents that we can have no unmediated access to reality as it is itself, it does not follow that we cannot discriminate between true and false. Indeed, it is a scandal to think otherwise.

Rorty sees problems with postmodernist moves to escape traditional philosophy. But he sees also that Dewey does not exactly fit his larger picture. In agreement with Santayana, Rorty insists that Dewey's efforts at a "naturalistic metaphysics" betrays "a recurrent flaw in Dewey's work: his habit of announcing a bold new positive program when all he offers, and all he needs to offer, is criticism of the tradition" (1982: 78). To be sure, Dewey does offer "a bold new positive program"—a naturalistic metaphysics with epistemology replaced by his version of "logic" (Sleeper, 1986). And he needed to do this because he could not step out of history and argue, as Rorty does, that knowledge and truth are pseudo problems that will go away once we abandon the claims of philosophy. Indeed, it is quite one thing to try to convince us that "warranted assertability" could replace "truth," understood as certainty, and quite another to say that, for pragmatists, "there are no constraints on inquiry save conversational ones—no wholesale constraints derived from the nature of objects, or the mind, or of language, but only those retail constraints provided by the remarks of our fellow-inquirers" (1982: 165). Worse, "the Socratic virtues—willingness to talk, to listen to other people, to weigh the consequences of actions on other people—are *simply* moral virtues. . . .

The pragmatists tell us that the conversations which it is our moral duty to continue is *merely* our project, the European's intellectual form of life" (1982: 172).

As several of essays in both Part I and Part II try to make clear, there are, for Dewey, considerable constraints on inquiry, beginning with a taken-for-granted independently existing nature, our embeddedness in it, our history and indeed, those ongoing institutional arrangements which often make impossible the required "conversation." Thus, the inquiry which produced molecular chemistry as we now understand it very much depended both on the nature of the independently existing world and the practices which show that, as Peirce argued, there is a preferred mode of fixing belief about it. Similarly, our embeddedness in nature and history both enables and constrains us in action. Thus, for example, as Part III tries to show, there are good reasons to believe that Dewey was fully aware that there were enormous obstacles to having the kind of knowledge that he thought was essential to a democratic society and a humane life.

The writer who is the inspiration for the main thrust of most of the essays in this volume is Ralph W. Sleeper, my former colleague at Queens College. His wonderful *The Necessity of Pragmatism* (1986) provides a systematic effort to respond to both sets of the friends of Dewey. The reader might notice here that for many years four members of the Queens department had continuing conversation about Dewey and, more generally, about pragmatism. These include John J. McDermott, Jack B. Noone, and Eugene Fontinell. Our conversations never lacked passion but never approached violence.

Because Dewey's thought was both rich and provocative, it is hoped that the essays of this volume, written over a period of some twenty-five years, provide a contemporary refocusing of current problems, both philosophical and political. The essays are easily organized under four main headings.

PART I: PRAGMATISM AND SCIENCE

David Hollinger has rightly argued that the critical role played by the pragmatists was "to find and articulate" a "way of life consistent with what they and contemporaries variously perceived as the implications of modern science" (Hollinger, 1985: 93). Part I finds a deep irony in this. It is widely held, by friends *and* enemies, that the pragmatists succeeded. On this interpretation, the pragmatists adopted an "instrumentalist" view of science in which successful prediction and control-vindicated inquiry. By subordinating *all* inquiry to "practical ends," they could show that a belief was warranted *only* insofar as it was "scientific." Finally, they could then vindicate a culture whose

"social motor" was science. But there is a deep irony in this: As Chapter 1, "Pragmatic Philosophy of Science and the Charge of Scientism," tries to show, this "victory" was pyrrhic: In this chapter, I argue that the foregoing interpretation is a stunning distortion and that the pragmatists failed utterly in their quest to set a new course for a "scientific" civilization. Not only were the forces at work resistant to their criticisms, but their fundamental insights, in a paradoxical inversion, became absorbed in distorted forms. This was especially critical as regards psychology and the social sciences—as Chapters 2 and 3 try to show.

By looking at the views of Peirce as well as James, we can see more clearly Dewey's distinctive and original response. Chapter 1 provides, as well, a general introduction to themes and issues taken up in subsequent chapters and parts of the volume. Thus, Chapter 2 turns to Dewey's relation to the history of American psychology and argues that contrary to much established opinion, not only did Dewey have no influence in the path taken, but that as early as 1896, he marked out a path which today offers considerable promise for a genuinely scientific psychology.

The key is a proper understanding of his much ignored and when noticed, misunderstood, ideas on logic, understood by him as the theory of inquiry. It not only points the way to a powerful conception of an "ecological psychology," but as Part II argues, it is at the heart of Dewey's rejection of traditional epistemology.

It is striking here that his enemies, for example, Bertrand Russell, found it to be a confused mess and that most of his friends have paid no attention to it. Striking here also is the fact that the two most recent and otherwise very useful overall accounts of Dewey, Robert Westbrook's *John Dewey and American Democracy* (1991) and Alan Ryan's *John Dewey and the High Tide of American Liberalism* (1995), almost entirely ignore it. Ryan, surely a competent philosopher of science, refers to the *Logic* as "vast and somewhat baffling" (309). Following on the excellent work of Tom Burke (1994), Chapter 2 develops the central role and key ideas of the *Logic* as the critical part of the misunderstanding of Dewey's relation to psychology as a science. I conclude by arguing that, versus the dominant "Cartesian" varieties associated with a good deal of what is termed "cognitive science," the *Logic* provides excellent philosophical ground for an ecological psychology. Thus, as Burke writes, "in contrast with a classical empiricist view of perception (involving so-called sense data, sense impression, stimulations or nerve endings, irritations of body surfaces, and so forth), ecological psychology emphasizes a different array of theoretical concepts; one being the concept of 'invariants' and another the concept of affordances . . ." (1994: 84). The pertinence of these ideas for a critical realist theory of science are picked up in Chapter 5.

Chapters 3 and 4 extend the argument to the social sciences. From the perspective of naturalism, Dewey could easily respond to the fundamental problems of the social sciences, but especially the series of invidious dualisms: subjectivism/objectivism, agency/structure, nature/culture, the idiographic, and the nomothetic. In this context, of special note, is his usually ignored or misunderstood theory of meaning, a theory shared by his Chicago colleague, G. H. Mead. But while there is an independently existing external world, it is striking that as social forms do not exist independently of the beliefs and actions of situated agents, only a naturalism can escape the poles of subjectivism and materialism.

PART II: NOT ANOTHER EPISTEMOLOGY

This part picks up another central theme raised in Chapter 1, the central position in Dewey's naturalism of his remarkable and much ignored *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* (1938), which, as he insisted, was "not another epistemology." Chapter 5 considers the broader context of "naturalism" and "subjectivism," and seeks to locate Dewey in this context. Chapter 6 assumes the main thrust of the *Logic*, and considers critically some competing efforts at "naturalistic epistemology," including the work of Quine, Rescher, and Laudan.

Two problems stand out. First, all of the many varieties of contemporary analytic epistemology share in what can be termed an "epistemological individualism." This is a legacy of ruggedly antiecological individualistic traditional epistemology, a legacy which, it is critical to emphasize, also profoundly affects a great deal of work in current cognitive psychology (Chapter 2).

Quine, whose version of "naturalistic epistemology" has nothing in common with Dewey's, despite suggestions to the contrary, gives an exemplary characterization of "epistemological individualism": Thus:

> This human subject is accorded a certain experimentally controlled input—certain patterns of irradiation in certain frequencies, for instance—and in the fullness of time the subject delivers as output a description of the three-dimensional external world and its history (Quine, 1969: 77).

It is hardly clear how we get from "patterns of irradiation" to concepts, or whether, finally, the "output" which is a "description of the three-dimensional external world" can be established as true. The same problems arise for those who identify themselves as pursuing alternative epistemologies. "Internalists" and "reliabilists" like William Lycan and Alvin Goldman, but also

"externalists" and "naturalists" of various stripes, for example, Hilary Kornblith and Philip Kitcher. On these views, the social is not denied; but it enters only as regards either the explanation of false belief or "the social organization of knowledge"—with Robert K. Merton identified as having authored "the most important twentieth century work." Remarkably, no attention is paid to the important work in recent sociology of science, including here work by the so-called strong program, and work by Latour, Pickering, Hacking, and many others.

I said that there are two problems. Even we acknowledge the role of the social in perception and understanding, it is hardly clear whether we can, following Dewey, simply ignore the problem of Pyrhonian skepticism. The problem is not justifying the existence of an external world, or whether that world is structured in some fashion or other, but whether, given "the naturalistic equivalence of the knowledge of different cultures," we can justify claims to even warranted belief while at the same time avoiding either circularity or dogmatism. Thus, can we say that when the Karam utters "I see a kobity now" he is wrong, that what he sees is really a cassowary? Quine's version of naturalistic epistemology, as well as most traditional epistemology, either assume that some privileged beliefs are true or they assume that something vaguely identified as "science" yields truth. In Chapter 6, at least in the spirit of Dewey, we consider three pragmatic approaches to the problem of privileging the claims of science without circularity or dogmatism. I suggest that instead of seeking to warrant pragmatically assertions or methods, we take practices as our point of departure. This provides a far more plausible, even if modest, outcome.

PART III: DEMOCRACY

There is perhaps no term so badly abused as "democracy." Originally, of course, it meant (*literally*) that the people *rule*. While not all those living in Athens were citizens, citizens actually met and made decisions, which affected them all. When the U.S. Constitution convinced the world that the people could be sovereign and still be entirely excluded from participation in decision-making—exactly as Madison made clear, liberal republics became "democracies."[3] With this move, not only did capitalism become consistent with democracy, it became the ideal arrangement! "People's democracies" accepted Aristotle dictum—and Madison's, that if the demos who are poor achieved power, they would abolish private property as contrary to their interests. The people's democracies could be one-party states as long as they made the effort to realize the democratic value of equality. After all, as Mar-

shall Tito liked to point out, since the people did not rule in either the (now gone) Yugoslavian state or in the United States, the difference was really only one party as against two!

The problem of democracy in the era of the modern nation-state was brilliantly posed in the 1920s in a remarkable debate between Dewey and Walter Lippmann who argued that in the United States, tweedle-dum and tweedle-dee best characterized our party system. The debate, considered in Chapter 7, remains of profound relevance especially given the nearly complete capitulation to the idea that "there is no alternative" to the liberal capitalist democracies of the advanced industrial societies. Dewey surely thought otherwise.

The occasion for this debate was World War I. But it is critical to notice that the war changed the minds of both parties and that war remains the generally unacknowledged problem for "democracy" in the modern world. That is, until the Great War, Dewey's perception of American democracy was largely uncritical and we cannot begin to understand him on the subject of democracy until we locate his maturing ideas against the background of the war and of the writings of Walter Lippmann. Chapter 7 attempts an analytical/historical consideration of the conditions and content of this debate.

Briefly, Dewey fully grasped the power of Lippmann's brilliant critique, but he could not accept Lippmann's solution. Lippmann made two fundamental moves. First, he insisted that the citizen cannot know what is happening or what ought to happen, and even if they could, there is a structured incapacity to constitute any sort of coherent "public opinion." Only "mystical democrats" could believe that the people had "a will" and that this was—even could be—actually realized.

But Lippmann was not threatened by this outcome, since he also insisted that the critical question of government was not whether citizens actually "participated," or whether it sought and realized "the will of the people," but whether "it is producing a certain minimum of health, of decent housing, of material necessities, of education, of freedom, of pleasures, of beauty" (1954: 196–97). Accordingly, "the essence of popular government," notwithstanding tweedle-dum and tweedle-dee, is a choice between supporting "the Ins when things are going well" and supporting "the Outs when they seem to be going badly" (126).

The capacity to "throw the bums out" does give a minimum of accountability and this should not be discounted,[4] but Lippmann's criteria are empty of rational content. If the citizen is to appraise the success or failure of a regime in power, then she has to make impossible counterfactual judgments and to find some way for these to congeal into a coherent majority vote. Lippmann gave a host of reasons why, under present institutional arrangements, this is impossible. But if so, there is simply no rational ground for applying

Lippmann's criteria. What indeed is "minimum of health" or "freedom" and how can one know if the Outs would have done better? Lippmann fell back on a thoroughly elitist version of his argument regarding science. "Gradually . . . the more enlightened directing minds have called in experts who were trained, or had trained themselves, to make parts of this Great Society intelligible to those who manage it" (370). Though these "enlightened directing minds" knew that they needed help, they were "slow to call in the social scientist" (371). Lippmann hopes that the lesson has been learned. What is needed, he opines, is presidential leadership responsive to the best of "social scientific knowledge"![5]

This is an unembarrassed technocratic solution to the problem of democracy. But, obviously, it assumes that "experts" can have the requisite knowledge, and it still confronts the problem of assessing counterfactuals. Moreover, even assuming that "experts" make no mistakes, actions have consequences that generally cannot be undone. War is surely the most obvious instance.

Perhaps the recent Bush dominance of American politics is the best and worst case for Lippmann. The capacity to "throw the bums out" is a test of "democracy," but we need to see clearly what democracy thus amounts to. Put aside the fact that mechanisms of opinion formation allow those with huge sums of money to manipulate the opinions of citizens. Put aside also that it is relatively easy to disenfranchise voters, that there are serious problems with the electoral system, including the electoral college and the U.S. system of "representation." Put aside also that, as we more recently have discovered, with electronic voting, there is no way to know if the results of voting using the new electronic technologies are even truthful![6]

In the midterm election of 2006, it seems clear enough that American voters did repudiate at least *some* of the policies of President Bush and the Republican controlled Congress. But not only is there no way to weigh the relative importance of the many policies adopted (and rejected) and to identify some coherent alternatives, but these decisions and their consequences have inalterably reshaped the world. While this is always the case, decisions are not all equally monumental. The most obvious case is the war in Iraq where the consequences include the death of thousands, the waste of billions of dollars, a civil war, and likely the promotion of global terrorism. By January 2007, it seemed that the clear message of the voter on the war in Iraq could be ignored. Indeed, confirming Lippmann on tweedle-dum and tweedle-dee, the leaders of the Democratic Party comfortably took positions remarkably similar to those of the sitting President! Moreover, there is already an argument about which of the President's legacies will be more important: the war, the inattention to the environment, the attack on the division of powers and

civil liberties, the huge deficit or the stunning decline in America's standing in the world.

Indeed, the main argument for self-determination is precisely that if interdependent persons must live with decisions that affect them all they must have a hand in making them.[7] But Dewey went further. For him, the problem of democracy and social science were intimately connected. Lippmann and the technocrats failed to realize that "experts" could indeed provide "information," but policy needs also a clear idea of the present situation of persons and of goals to be pursued. That is, generating coherent policy that affects the lives of interdependent individuals requires the direct participation of these individuals. Lippmann earlier had it right: "The scientific spirit is the discipline of democracy, the escape from drift, the outlook of the free man" (1961: 151). But this requires not experts but a democratic social science. As Dewey insisted, what is required is "the perfecting of the means and ways of communicating meanings so that genuinely shared interest in the consequences of interdependent activities may inform desire and effort and thereby direct action" (1954: 155). A "public" which satisfied this goal would still make mistakes and would still suffer the consequences of these; but they would be, at least, their mistakes.

Dewey recognized full well that the conditions for realizing a democratic social science that could constitute a public required radical change in existing institutions. And this was not merely a change in our electoral politics—important as these may be, but a change that acknowledged that in capitalism, decisions of major social importance are legitimately made by persons entirely unaccountable to the electorate. If democracy means that persons have a say in determining the conditions of their everyday lives, then democracy required some form of socialism. Dewey was never clear about how socialism was to be institutionalized, and there is evidence that he believed, wrongly on my view of the matter, that "the difference and choice between a socialism that is public and one that is capitalist" regarded a choice between markets versus planning.[8] But however that may be, the problem of realizing democracy pushed him to what is easily read as an anarchist vision![9] Chapter 8 considers this by looking carefully at what Dewey actually said against the background of actual anarchist thought. Yet, at the same time, Alan Ryan observes rightly: "He was not a fire-eating leftist, and never became one" (1995: 117).

Unfortunately, not only was anarchism a dirty word by the time Dewey wrote *The Public and Its Problems*—Sacco and Vanzetti were executed in 1921 for their beliefs even though the charges against them were unproven, but the leftism of the day was inevitably connected to Bolshevism and a version of Marx which was rooted in Engels (Manicas, 2000) and in the 2nd

International, and, subsequently, with what became the standard, but also contestable version of Lenin (Lewin, 2005). Indeed, it is absolutely crucial to notice that Dewey had read little of Marx and that his anticommunism was squarely directed at the Stalinism that had solidified in the 1930s. Similarly, a very different reading of Marx became possible only in the 1930s with the publication for the first time of the early writings of Marx (in German), the complete *German Ideology* and *The Grundrisse.* Chapter 9 offers an historical reading of Marx and Dewey and shows that understanding Dewey requires posing his thought against the *Stalinist* version of "Marxism/Leninism." Dewey had no patience with the pseudoscience of a vulgar dialectical or historical materialism—mostly for good reasons, even if this leaves open the question of whether as Chapter 9 argues, some other version of Marx was easily compatible with Dewey and whether some patent shortcomings in Dewey's analysis might be filled with some pertinent Marx. It is acknowledged by a number of important writers that Dewey and Marx shared fundamental philosophical premises, but it is not always noticed that they also shared in their vision of a good society and in thinking that a "gradualist" politics need not be antirevolutionary (Chapter 9).[10] The point, more generally, is that Dewey tried to find a politics between liberals who insisted on parliamentary means but who saw no need for radical change in the existing social structure, and the "scientistic," eschatological and insurrectionary versions of the Marxists. The problem remains—assuring the continuing relevance of Dewey.

Finally, then, Dewey would insist that a politics without vision is merely unprincipled opportunism. But Dewey's vision of democracy is not merely an abstraction. As a practice and a process in which action is informed by a recognition of our inevitable interdependencies, it is a realizable ideal. As Rousseau, Marx, and Dewey saw, interdependency is inevitable, and interdependency does establish the conditions of injustice and tyranny. But democracy is its only solution. There are no assurances, to be sure, but as Emma Goldman observed "The night cannot last forever."

The final two chapters of Part III consider Dewey's political theory in contrast to three more recent and influential interventions. The publication of John Rawls's *A Theory of Justice* (1971) generated a veritable industry. For the first time in a very long time, here was a philosopher doing normative political theory. Rawls articulated a liberal theory which had a New Deal look about it, progressive without being radical. It was quickly responded to by Rawls's Harvard colleague Robert Nozik. His book, *Anarchy, State and Utopia* (1974) was a criticism of Rawls from the Libertarian Right. It earned him a cover in the *New York Times Magazine.*

It is critical to notice that neither Rawls nor Nozick had much to say about democracy. Rawls assumed some form of "representative regime" and (with

J. S. Mill) even defended plural voting. While democracy is not indexed in Rawls's book, Nozick surely went further. After acknowledging that democracy is the idea that "people have a right to a say in the decisions that importantly affect their lives," Nozick asserted, remarkably: "After we exclude from consideration the decisions which others have a right to make and the actions which would aggress against me, steal from me, and so on, . . . it is not clear that there are any decisions remaining about which even to raise the question" (1974: 270). For both, accordingly, justice was the key concept.

Dewey is quite the opposite. As argued in Chapter 10, if one surveys the voluminous writings of Dewey, the first thing that one notices is the relative *inattention* paid by Dewey to the problem of justice. Altogether, there are perhaps not more than a dozen pages of sustained discussions devoted explicitly to the topic. These discussions are little gems, and they offer what are, I think, fatal criticisms of the liberal theories of both Rawls and Nozick. This, too, is generally ignored.

Dewey, always concrete and historical, recognized that what we call "liberal democracy" emerged at a specific time and place in world history, that it did not have democracy as one of its goals, and that while it celebrated the autonomous individual—a prerequisite for the ideology of market capitalism, it offered a false picture of individuals and their relations. Not only were persons *social* beings, deeply interdependent and "encumbered" (to borrow a term from Sandel), but "the control of the social environment which is furnished by the institution of property" makes the idea of equal freedom in liberal democracies "a pure absurdity" (Dewey, 1954: 271).

It is not that Dewey did not care about justice. Rather, he insisted that democracy was the primary problem and that because the fundamental assumptions of associated life were misconceived by liberal theories, it disvalued democracy. Liberal theory thus shares with Lippmann the idea that "participation" was not an issue and that as long as the quality of everyday life was as good as could be expected, all was well enough. For liberal theory, securing political and civil rights, some measure of opportunity for all, unimpeded markets and private property was all that "democracy" demanded. It is striking that when, in 1928, Dewey traveled to the New Soviet Union, he observed: "I was certainly not prepared for what I saw; it came as a shock" (LW, Vol. 3: 217). For him, the "experiment" had two goals. First, there was what had concerned Lippmann—security *against* want and illness, and *for* health, recreation and "a degree of material ease." The other was the "familiar democratic ideals, familiar in words at least—of liberty, equality and brotherhood." The hope was that both will be "more completely realized in a social regime based on voluntary cooperation, on conjoint worker's control and management of industry, with an accompanying abolition of private

property as a fixed institution" (LW, Vol. 3: 244). Dewey soon enough came to see that "the experiment" which, under the prevailing conditions, could not have succeeded, had turned to disaster (Manicas, 1989, Chapter 11). Since then we have been left with the idea, inherited from Wilson and currently pursued by Bush, that making the world "safe for democracy" really means making the world "safe for liberal capitalism."

Apart from "Marxist" criticisms of liberal theory, there is a currently fashionable critique of "rights-based liberalism" often termed, "republican-communitarianism." It is clear enough that Rawls and Nozick (along with Flathman, Dworkin, Feinberg, Gewirth, Sen, and many others) are, despite differences, "rights-based liberals." The other side is a much less clear group and might include any number of diverse writers who have criticized liberal philosophy and promoted some version or other of "community," including Dewey, Hannah Arendt, Robert Paul Wolff, Charles Taylor, Roberto Mangiabera Unger, Michael Walzer, Carol Gould, Hannah Pitkin, Amitai Etzioni, and some others. The relation to democracy of these writers is also very diverse. But "republican-communitarism" is well represented by Michael Sandel's, *Democracy's Discontent: American in Search of a Public Philosophy* (1996), discussed in Chapter 11. Of particular interest here is Sandel's effort to link his views to those of Dewey.

There are two related features of Sandel's position. First, he claims to have a version of "self-rule" and second—the heart of his critique of liberalism—the real problem of government is not securing liberal justice as defined by either Rawls or Nozick, but the cultivation of "civic virtue." To be a citizen requires "a sense of belonging," the existence of "a moral bond with the community whose fate is at stake." On this view, governments have legitimate concerns with "soulcraft," what he elsewhere calls "the formative project."

Sandel is quite right, of course, to say that Dewey was a critic of liberal individualism, but Dewey called for *radical* version of the alternative, not as in Sandel, a reactionary version of "encumbered selves" who, like Robert E. Lee, concluded that his obligation to Virginia (and to the institution of slavery) was not merely of sentimental import, but had "moral force" (Sandel, 1996: 15). For Dewey, "community" was essential, but for him, in contrast to Sandel, it was grounded on recognition of interdependence not on blood, habit, religion, or language. Similarly, Sandel seeks to capture the essential ingredient of democracy by speaking of "self-rule," but in sharp contrast to Dewey, there is simply no attention paid to what this means institutionally. One wishes that he had read Lippmann, or more lately, Robert Dahl. This absence is explained, in part at least, by his distorted view of American history—a history that, as noted, was well understood by Dewey and Lippmann.

Worse, perhaps, for Dewey, in contrast to Sandel, the problem of American democracy was not "moral" but institutional and structural: In conditions of alienation, "publics" cannot exist.

PART IV: WHY NOT DEWEY?

The problem of American democracy is well understood by Cornel West in his important *The American Evasion of Philosophy* (1989), discussed in Chapter 12. In the spirit of Rorty, he wishes that Dewey had been "a more consistent historicist pragmatist," instead as I would have it, "a more consistent naturalist," exactly in Marx's sense. West, sympathetic to Marxian ideas, sees the radical and unfinished character of Dewey's emancipatory project. While one may have some misgivings about both his account of Emerson and his efforts at tapping American cultural materials, his critical reflections on the failure of Dewey's project are especially provocative and suggest the deep reasons for what remains an unsolved dilemma: How to be both radical and committed to democratic processes.

A useful comparison to West's book is Robert Westbrook's *Democratic Hope: Pragmatism and the Politics of Truth* (2005), discussed in Chapter 13. On his version, Dewey neither "evaded" nor transformed philosophy. Rather he holds that Dewey should be read as offering an epistemological defense of democracy, something which he recognizes Dewey did not do. For Westbrook, the "argument" has been filled in by the recent pragmatisms of Putnam and Misak. But the project is both alien to Dewey and, in contrast to his well informed book (1991), ignores the arguments that Dewey actually did make (see above).

Westbrook admits that he gave Dewey's logic "short shrift" and he endorses Kloppenberg's view that "Dewey was taking the challenge of 'constructing a democratic political culture on the quicksand of instrumentalist logic'" (2005: 177). This is half-right: the *Logic* was the ground of his vision of a democratic culture, but one needs to overcome a good deal of the philosophical tradition before one can see that it can hardly be characterized as "quicksand."

Similarly, Westbrook's suggestion that Dewey never leaves the "populism" of late nineteenth-century "producer-republicanism" is a fairly typical criticism that fails to account for the changes in his views following the Great War. While Dewey's socialism contradicted all "actually existing socialisms," it was fully consistent with Marx's idea that "producers" in capitalist society are alienated, that neither wage workers nor "independent producers" on the Jeffersonian model, are capable of what Marx termed, "free production."

Again, one must see that Dewey's critique was not nostalgic, but radical in just the ways that Marx would have endorsed.

The temptation to assist Dewey by constructing "arguments" which he lacked is the central task of Festenstein's *Pragmatism and Political Theory* (1997), discussed in Chapter 14. Like Westbrook, Festenstein writes solidly within the tradition of Anglo-American analytic philosophy and, viewed through these lens, he finds fatal problems in Dewey's naturalistic ethical framework (62, 99, 145). He concludes that Dewey had "a scientistic hope for a physics of problem-solving" (45) and that his "empirical theory of valuation seems to rest on the possibility of a prior science of problems and their resolution, which does not exist" (44). But inquiry, as Dewey understood it, was not some "prior" science of problem solving. It was the only defensible way to address *all* problems, scientific and otherwise. Dewey did not, of course, embrace the prevailing "fact/value" dichotomy and he often spoke of "alleged scientific social inquiry." The following text neatly sums up a theme which he pursued throughout his long life.

> The sociologist, like the psychologist, often presents himself as a camp follower of genuine science and philosophy, picking up scraps here and there and piecing them together in somewhat aimless fashion. . . . But social ethics is the change from inquiring into the nature of value in general to an inquiry of the particular values which ought to be realized in the life of everyone, and of the conditions which shall render possible this realization (*Early Works*, Vol. 5: 23).

Chapter 15, the final chapter, rejoins the question of Dewey and social science and argues that the currently fashonable postmodern reading of pragmatic social science will not do. So why not Dewey?

NOTES

1. As Sleeper (1986) remarks, we need to resist "the almost universal habit of taking for granted that experience is the subject matter of [Dewey's] metaphysics" (1986: 6).

2. Perry's version of direct realism is, to be sure, untenable. See Shook, *Dewey's Empirical Theory of Knowledge and Reality*. But see Roy Wood Sellar's "Materialism and Human Knowing," in R. W. Sellars, V. J. McGill, and Marvin Farber (eds.), *Philosophy for the Future* (New York: Macmillan, 1949).

3. See my *War and Democracy,* especially Parts I and III. Lippmann and Dewey well understood the consequences of this shift in the meaning of democracy. Lippmann wrote: the fiction that the United States is a democracy owes "to the victory of Thomas Jefferson. . . . It is a fair guess that if everyone had always regarded the Constitution as did the authors of it, the Constitution would have been violently over-

thrown, because loyalty to the Constitution and loyalty to democracy would have seemed incompatible" (Lippmann, 1954: 284). Dewey, who was never a "mystical democrat," offered similar sentiments.

4. Most Americans believe, it seems, that one has a democracy if there are "free elections," but free elections require political and civil liberties and it is these, not free elections that mark the important difference between tyrannies and non-tyrannies. For this reason, as well, liberalism is often confused with democracy. See Part IV.

5. Rorty remarks: "Even someone like myself, whose admiration for John Dewey is almost unlimited, cannot take seriously his defense of participatory democracy against Walter Lippman's insistence on the need for expertise" (1998: 104). Compare Westbrook's very useful Epilogue (1991) and his later account in *Democratic Hope* (Chapter 14 below) which seems, at least, to capitulate to a Rortyean problematic.

6. While they have been under attack by the Bush regime, political and civil liberties are not yet utterly compromised. People can still inquire, speak out, and organize, even if this has little effect on policy. Accordingly, if democracy in the United States (as elsewhere) is profoundly constrained, the United States is not a tyranny.

7. There is, of course, absolutely no democracy as regards what is hypocritically called "the community of nations." See Dewey's remarkable and much misunderstood efforts in the campaign to outlaw war (Chapter 8).

8. It is easy enough to show that centralized planning, Soviet style, cannot be theoretically sustained and is disastrous practically. As Mandel, for example, sees, one must assume the whole of general equilibrium theory. But there are fatal objections to this theory—as argued by Hayekians among many others. There are variant forms of market socialism, but surely a vision to be pursued was laid out in the much ignored essay by Diane Elson, "Market Socialism or Socialism of the Market" (1988).

9. Once we are clear about misconceptions of anarchist politics including the idea that anarchists were terrorists and utopian in the worst sense, there is nothing preposterous about seeing Dewey as an anarchist. At the time of the Pullman strike, he wrote to Alice Dewey that he had realized "how 'anarchistic' (to use the current term here) our ideas and especially feelings are" (quoted by Westbrook, *Democratic Hope*: 86). See also Hook's extremely useful account of the Marxian theory of "the state." Hook (1933) distinguishes "society," "government," and "state," and argues that "where the government represents the needs and interests of the entire community, it does not need [the state] special and coercive force behind it" (214). Hence, for Marxists, if democracy is to prevail, the state must be "smashed." Indeed, Lenin's *State and Revolution* (1905) is an anarchist tract and a proper reading of "What Is to be Done" and of the period from the October Revolution to Lenin's death, shows that while Lenin made many mistakes, including, for example, destroying the Constituent Assembly, he never wavered in his defense of the soviets, the most democratic of the institutions in the evolving USSR (Lewin, 2005).

10. During the much-misunderstood period following the abdication of the Kaiser, the revolutionary goals of Social Democracy, as understood by Marx, Engels *and* the "revisionists" were betrayed by SPD leadership. After this betrayal, with the help of Bolshevik revolutionary practice, Social Democracy was redefined as consistent with

a capitalism "with a human face." Similarly, the highly restricted choices of the Bolsheviks in Russia generated a very distorted view of socialism. See Manicas, *War and Democracy* (1989), Chapters 11 and 12. In both the German and Soviet case, the critical question is: "could it have been otherwise"? As Hook insisted, following both Marx and Engels, to be a socialist, one *had* to be a democrat. In our Orwellian world, the meanings of "anarchism," "socialism," *and* "democracy" are thoroughly corrupted.