

**A Democratic Life;
Dewey's Educational Philosophy
and the
Problem of Class Division**

by

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Abstract: *Democracy & Education*, one of history's most important works on educational theory is also one of John Dewey's most interesting and controversial. Throughout the text, Dewey recontextualizes both the concepts of education and democracy, interpreting both within a thoroughly social framework. Education becomes a process of living, especially with others, while democracy becomes an ethical mode of life to be cultivated both personally and culturally. Several challenges will be seen to stand against the development of democratic societies, the greatest of which is class stratification and the existence of a social elite. Within such a society, democratic living is constantly inhibited. This problem of class divide has also been the greatest problem in the successful adoption of Dewey's pedagogical theory in the institutions of formal education.

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Introduction

Within the history of modern philosophy of education, John Dewey stands as perhaps the greatest and most important thinker. His work in this area alone comprises volumes, all of it intertwined with his other areas of philosophical focus, where he is equally well known for his theories of aesthetics. This continuity of ideology draws from his knowledge and experience of the recent movement of American Pragmatism, a philosophy that fundamentally reconceptualized many central concepts and notions of its European predecessors.

His most prominent work in the theory of education is *Democracy and Education*. Published in 1916, this work explores the relations of political democracy and institutional education. In a fashion typical of Dewey and other Pragmatists, it begins by methodically working through the fundamental elements that comprise the complex notions of education and democracy, and quickly comes to establish unique interpretations that build into his culminating arguments.

Education must be understood as learning, a constant process that occurs not only in the designated schools of formal education but in all moments of life. Learning, and thus education, is a consequence of living, and as living is necessarily social so too is all learning. An analysis of education then must include examinations into social relations and how they affect learning.

Democracy too faces a similar, perhaps more radical reinterpretation. For Dewey, democracy cannot be reduced to a simple political system defined by elections and shared suffrage. It must be understood by the social, emotional principles that allow for this political structure to exist. In essence, democracy is a way of life. Again, examining political democracy comes to necessitate inspections of social relations.

The educational theories that Dewey would come to advocate, in this work and later ones, have been a source of great tension and hostility. Its 'liberal' approach to schooling has faced criticism that continues today. Despite this, it is often believed that his philosophy was adopted by public schools, and that the shape and degree of success or failure in modern schools is a consequence of this thinking. Although his ideas did have a remarkable impact on pedagogical theory, an analysis of *Democracy and Education* quickly reveals that far too many of his beliefs have been compromised or altogether forgotten, to appropriately judge those elements that have been embraced.

The single greatest critique offered by Dewey is that against the distinction between social and economic classes. In line with his thinking, such class stratification inhibits or prevents the communication and the shared social aims that are fundamental principles of democratic living. It is noteworthy that this intense, unfaltering criticism is what has been completely abandoned, for this class distinction and the power of the aristocratic elite have only grown in degree and scope since the time of his writing. That the inequality of economic classes, one of the most defining aspects of modern American culture, was so vehemently opposed by one of America's greatest thinkers may seem surprising, until it is understood that the expunction of this facet of his thinking is a direct consequence of the pervasive hold that hierarchical capitalist thinking has on general American thinking.

To understand this trajectory, from simply analyzing education and its political relations to concluding that class distinction is the single greatest threat to true political democracy, requires both some background information and significant extrapolation of the text. This work will begin with the historical and philosophical history that most pertains to Dewey's thinking, including a description of the development of European philosophy into Pragmatism in the

United States. This is followed to a close analysis of the text, from the social nature of education and its forms to the nature of democratic sentiment. After this has been established the problem of class inequality can be examined properly.

The ultimate conclusion will then be not simply that class stratification is, for Dewey, the greatest threat to the continuation and development of democracy. It will also become clear that regardless of the apparent absorption of Deweyan philosophy into educational theory, such an inclusion is fundamentally incomplete without serious restructuring of the current economic situation. All the critiques laid against Dewey's thinking that do not devote attention to this subject are warped, if not meaningless. The philosophy put forth in *Democracy and Education* is too fundamentally continuous and syncretic to be judged by any single portion of aspect, even if the formal institutions of education have attempted to adopt them. Only when viewed in full can the immensity of social critique offered in this work be understood.

Part I

Historic and Intellectual Context

John Dewey was born on October 20, 1859, just days after John Brown's inflammatory but unsuccessful raid on Harper's Ferry, and only a month before Charles Darwin would publish his revolutionary and controversial work, *On the Origin of Species*. Dewey would grow up through the aftermath and reconstruction of the devastating civil war that divided the nation from 1860 until 1864. While this war had nearly torn the United States apart and would leave in its wake swathes of destruction and the loss of approximately 600,000-800,000 American lives, the years that followed helped usher in a distinctly new epoch of American history, one that would come to be reflected in the ideology and work of Dewey.

During this time, the United States would see the continued development of its massive Westward expansion and colonization, under the idea of manifest destiny, the belief that the United States should stretch from coast to coast. This was soon followed by a second Industrial Revolution, which saw significant advancements in communication (telegraph, telephone, radio), transportation (railways, automobile), and manufacturing technology (expansion of factories, industrialization), as well as the widespread adoption of electricity. These technological advancements allowed for rapid economic growth, encouraging a significant increase in immigration and a growing wealth disparity between those who profited off these advancements.

These changes also prompted significant developments in educational theory and public schooling. A steadily increasing population, many of whom were immigrants in need of education and social assimilation, encouraged this. The very fabric of American society was changing in fundamental ways, opening space for new philosophies and ideologies. Out of these Dewey would emerge as a quintessential American thinker and a towering figure in the area of the philosophy of education.

Dewey's Early Life

In a work analyzing the educational philosophy of Dewey, it is important to first recognize and assess the intellectual influences that informed his thought. Key moments throughout Dewey's upbringing and education would provide him with the intellectual foundation for his lifelong preoccupation with democracy, continuity, experimentalism, and practicality.

Born to a family of modest means living in a Vermont Congregationalist community, Dewey was given a unique perspective on American social life while growing up. Burlington, the town he grew up in, was known for having a "cosmopolitan atmosphere unusual for a

northern New England town” (“Dewey, John 1859-1952”), likely a consequence of being home to the state university. Dewey witnessed significant civic engagement and social cooperation within his rural hometown, and would often observe the locals discussing politics or debating residential issues at the one general store in town, owned by his father. In these early years of Dewey’s life, he would begin to formulate three ideas that “would come to define his mature vision of democracy: individualism offers a distorted vision of human freedom, genuine freedom is found in social cooperation, and true social freedom is impossible in a class society” (Livingston and Quish).

While in college at the University of Vermont at the age of 15, Dewey discovered the works of T.H. Huxley, an avid proponent and defender of Darwin’s evolutionary theory. In fact, “Dewey himself attributed his “intellectual awakening” to T.H. Huxley’s college textbook on physiology, which shaped his vision of man as entirely the product of natural evolutionary processes” (“Dewey, John 1859-1952”). Dewey was drawn to the “interdependence and interrelated unity of all things” (“Dewey, John 1859-1952”) within the physiology outlined in Huxley’s textbook.

A critical moment in the development of Dewey’s philosophic thought occurred when he began his graduate studies at Johns Hopkins University in 1882. While at Johns Hopkins University, he studied German idealism with the Hegelian scholar, George Sylvester Morris, and experimental psychology with G. Stanley Hall. The synthesis of these ideologies, combined with his fascination with evolutionary theory, “propelled Dewey's early thought, and established the general tenor of his ideas throughout his philosophical career” (Field). Dewey felt that older philosophies had long been dominated by what he would later term “the quest for certainty”, an almost intrinsic presumption on the form and nature of “truth.” Further background information

about this historical philosophy will help to demonstrate both the context and the profundity of Dewey's thinking.

The Enlightenment: The Split in Philosophy

Before Hegel and his contemporaries, philosophy from the Enlightenment period had been largely focused on the pursuit of a "truth" that was static, unchanging, or perhaps even eternal. It was understood as something of a "God's eye" view of existence, where "truth" referred to an absolute being that was, in essence, "correct." That is to say, philosophy had come to seek statements of irrefutable veracity under the belief that this would lead to an understanding of the world *as it actually was*, and not merely *as it appeared*.

As discussion evolved, this "Truth" (now often capitalized to indicate its association with static, absolute qualities), would become more and more tenuous, eventually spearheaded by Hegel and the German Idealist movement. Truth itself would become an increasingly mutable concept, and one that was increasingly tied not a theoretic omniscient divinity but to human beings. This discussion was originally divided between two philosophic camps: "rationalists" who believed that truth was accessed through the use of the human mind, via logic, mathematics, philosophy, and so on, and "empiricists" who argued that people understood and interacted with their world through their repeated experience of it. Rationalists would point to the ability of the human mind to seemingly comprehend concepts such as pure mathematics without or theoretically prior to any experience of the world, a principle which would later be referred to by the Latin phrase *a priori*, which translates literally to "from the former", referring to the mind's ability to understand these concepts based upon "truths" that were considered self-evident to any rational person. Empiricists instead demonstrated the way behavior developed from repeated exposure to the world itself, insisting that even "irrefutable" facts like basic mathematical

equations were still the consequence of the manner in which we experience that which surrounds us. Our comprehension of the world was *a posteriori*, again a Latin phrase, “from what comes after,” indicating that experience necessarily preceded understanding or knowledge. This division would frame almost the entire discipline of philosophy, for a considerable period of time.

The Thinker: The Philosophy of Immanuel Kant

Eventually, the philosopher Immanuel Kant would attempt to solve this rift between the two competing factions. He argued that there was an essential distinction between what he called the *noumena*, or ‘thing-in-itself’, and the *phenomena*, the thing as it appears to the person experiencing it. However, in a departure from some former principles, Kant believed that we could never know the *noumena*, either through reason or experience. Instead, we interpret the *noumena* through the very nature and construction of our minds and bodies, such that we never experience this *noumena* as it “truly” is. Everything is filtered through our experience such that we experience only *phenomena*, “truth” interpreted through the lens of our being. Kant emphasized the *a priori* not as pertaining to self-evident truths that the mind can discover and understand solely through thought and reflection, but instead as the biological construction of the human brain and the manner in which this assemblage necessarily structured all of our experience. The most important of these structures were time and space, known better historically as *extension*. This distinction posits the “human mind as an active originator of experience rather than just a passive recipient of perception” (Virgolim 473).

Although Kant’s theories sought to unify the two factions and solve the problems that had arisen in Enlightenment thought, they provided their own distinct set of problems and issues, many still inherited from the Enlightenment, that would provide the new intellectual ground for

the philosophers that would follow him. Kant had opened a set of proverbial floodgates for philosophy by denying that the thing-in-itself, the *noumena*, can be known. By arguing that we can only experience objects through our own filter, primarily by bringing the structures of temporality and extension to our experience, his theories allowed for an increased focus on the consequences of our experience of objects and the surrounding world, even as Kant himself remained largely fixated on the theoretical. It was in response to this new viewpoint that the near-omnipresent school of Hegelianism would arise, leading European philosophy in a new direction that coincided with the emergence of the Romantic period. However, while it would become extremely influential in the United States as well as Europe, an entirely new and unique branch of American philosophy would be born, at first in opposition to this growing movement.

In order to understand Dewey's work it is necessary to first examine three related but distinct movements that would influence that entirety of his work: the massive philosophical movement of Hegelianism, born out of German Idealism and based on the work of G.W.F. Hegel, the fledgling but intellectually powerful movement of American Pragmatism under C.S. Peirce and William James, and the new scientific world that followed the publication of the contentious but monumental *On the Origin of Species*, Charles Darwin's pioneering work on the theory of natural selection and evolution.

The Romantic: The Philosophy of GWF Hegel

From the outset, Hegel's philosophy expressed discomfort with the notion that we can never know the *noumenal* thing-in-itself. In the preface to his seminal and first major work, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel writes, "To help bring philosophy closer to the form of Science, to the goal where it can lay aside the title 'love of knowing' and be *actual* knowing – that is what I have set myself to do" (5). Kant had seemingly left the knowledge of this level of truth to the

divine, in the broadest sense, or perhaps to nothing at all. Hegel felt this as a denial of the spiritual experience of Truth, or what he would later call the Absolute. In a radical departure from the entire Enlightenment debate and inspired by Kant's ideas, Hegel came to argue that while no single individual could achieve this Absolute Truth through sensory-experience or reason, it could be reached by the collective form of humanity as a whole. In *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel posits that the subject-object divide of Kant could eventually be overcome by introducing a socio-temporal dimension to experience. The development of humanity itself represents an increasing move towards an understanding of the Absolute, making the pursuit of Truth the collective endeavor of all people instead of any single individual. This process was for him not only natural but seemingly inevitable, as humanity developed from its ancient origins, steeped in mysticism and barbarism, into the increasingly technological, lawful, and structured nation-states that Hegel saw in Germany at the time.

Hegel's belief in a perpetually forward-moving social development over the course of time has typically been understood through the supposed "Hegelian dialectic", a "method of historical and philosophical progress that postulates (1) a beginning proposition called a thesis, (2) a negation of that thesis called the antithesis, and (3) a synthesis whereby the two conflicting ideas are reconciled to form a new proposition" (Schnitker and Emmons). This attribution, although quickly ubiquitous in its time, is erroneous. In this form the dialectic was the work of Johann Fichte, a central figure in German Idealism, introduced in his early philosophical writings over a decade before *The Phenomenology of Spirit* was published. The dialectic itself was a response to Kantian philosophy, and both Fichte and Hegel would attribute their terminology in this area to Kant.

Hegel greatly altered this dialectic, providing new triadic terminologies to use in a novel and groundbreaking approach that completely re-evaluated the role and place of self-consciousness. His method to make philosophy “more scientific” centered on an examination not solely on the manner of the mind’s experience of objects, but on the relationship between this experience and the mind’s experience of itself. Instead of the unavoidable split of Kant’s *phenomena* and *noumena*, Hegel saw the new project of philosophy as a study of the intermingling of our experience both of the world and of mind, or consciousness, itself. Only through a simultaneous examination can something like truth be reached. However, truth is no longer an unchanging state of being outside of human experience. Instead, there is an unavoidable relationship between the self and our experience of objects.

The Naturalist: The Science of Charles Darwin

Before Pragmatism would arise as a philosophical movement in the United States, the world would receive one of science’s most important texts, spurring new debates and ideas in the fertile grounds of 19th century Europe and the American continents. In 1859, Charles Darwin, a well-traveled scientist versed in biology, geology, and naturalism (roughly the equivalent of modern chemistry or physics), published *On the Origin of Species*, often accredited with introducing the idea of evolution to the world at large.

Evolution as a discussion about the changing qualities of animals, however, had already been going on for some time, with many scientists and philosophers debating a bevy of theories. Hegel himself had broached the topic in the *Phenomenology*, but saw “evolution – from inanimate to animate to human forms of existence – as arising from an inner tension within the natural world itself, a natural dialectic in which things overcome their relative isolation by binding together in ever larger wholes, achieving higher forms of consciousness or spirit until

they reach the stage of self-conscious human existence” (Lawler 113). This example highlights a particular problem that such discussions had faced, namely that while they recognized the empirical evidence of change in the animal and plant life around them, they generally explained it through theory, often in tandem with other beliefs, and did not rely upon data or the scientific method. In Hegel this is clear, as his explanation of evolution simply mirrors his larger view of the development of *Geist* through human history towards a culminating point. Thus, for Hegel, evolution would eventually end.

The greatest contribution to evolutionary theory in *On the Origin of Species* was not in proposing evolution itself for the first time (indeed the earliest publications of the text avoided the word almost entirely due to its many connotations), but in the introduction of *natural selection* as the principle way in which evolution took place. Contrary to popular belief, the publication was not met by public outcry, but instead sold immensely well, both because it was written for non-specialists and by an already well known and established figure. This helped cement “branching evolution” as a widely accepted scientific fact well before the end of century. Crucial to this was the methodology and evidence that Darwin provided in arguing his point, some of which stretched back nearly thirty years. He did not simply present a theory, but constructed one from the shape of the scientific method and out of decades of information and data. Despite this, and the increasing acceptance of evolution, it would take much longer for Darwin’s theories of natural and sexual selection to become scientifically undisputed.

The Logician and the Painter: The Birth of American Pragmatism

Often considered the “only school of philosophy native to the United States” (Haack 9), Pragmatism began as the project of the singular, iconoclastic thinker Charles Sanders Peirce, although his ideas would soon spread and take on new meanings and interpretations. As fast as it

would spread, it was also heavily critiqued in its early stages and in the many, varied forms that would follow, both by those who misinterpreted it and those who understood it. Indeed, since its inception Pragmatism has often been criticized for a plurality of contradictory philosophical stances and beliefs, even by those following in its tradition. Some give a number to these ‘forms of Pragmatism’, some, like F.C.S. Schiller, “cheerfully acknowledged that there are as many pragmatisms as pragmatists”, while others like contemporary thinker Richard Rorty have claimed that Pragmatism is a “vague, ambiguous, and overworked word” (Haack, 18).

While it seems absurd that a single philosophical system could entertain such a vast amount of clashing perspectives, the central tenet that runs through the history of American Pragmatism is that it is not the content, but the methodology and approach that serve as a unifying factor for these many positions. The idea that Pragmatism was a method, from which could be derived a great many different positions, was described in a famous analogy by the Italian Pragmatist Giovanni Papini, who claimed the philosophy was like,

...a corridor in a hotel. Innumerable chambers open out of it. In one you may find a man writing an aesthetic volume; in the next someone on his knees praying for faith; in a third a chemist investigating a body’s properties... They all own the corridor, and all must pass through it(Haack, 10).

In its barest essence, this ‘corridor’ of shared Pragmatic methodology was rooted in the ‘Pragmatic Maxim’, the philosophy’s defining approach to truth. A term coined by Peirce, the Pragmatic Maxim is a maxim of logic, stating that “the rule for attaining the third grade of clearness of apprehension is as follows: Consider what effects, that might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then, our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object” (Peirce 293). Even this shared methodology changed with every philosopher it passed through, leading to immense fundamental differences despite a shared school of thought.

Pierce would soon be followed by the psychologist William James, who would quickly become a fan and public proponent of Pierce's work. Unlike the rational, strict mind of Pierce, a scientist and logician, James possessed an artistic, spiritual, and mind, and had hoped to be a painter in his early days. Although often wracked by bouts of melancholy (what we today would call depression), he was a hopeful, generally amiable if not cheerful character, and the passion filling his work reflects this. He continued much of what Pierce has begun in re-conceptualizing 'truth', and used early Pragmatic methods in the exploration of morality, as well as his near obsession with faith and spirituality.

As Pragmatists, Peirce, James, and Dewey took the "open, experimental, and practical nature of techno-scientific inquiry to be the paradigmatic example of all inquiry ("Dewey, John."). For Dewey and his fellow Pragmatists, "all inquiry is similar in form to technoscientific inquiry in that it is fallibilistic, resolves in practice some initial question through an experimental method, but provides no final absolute answer" ("Dewey, John.").

The third of the "three founders" of American Pragmatism, Dewey was positioned to exert a massive influence on the direction of American philosophy. Unlike Peirce, who was notoriously disliked and lived much of his life in poverty, and James, a vibrant, independent, aesthetic soul sometimes beset by severe bouts of melancholy or depression, Dewey always appeared collected and calm, with a sociable personality and an ability to work and hold discussions in seemingly any conditions. These traits, perhaps combined with his experience as a husband and father, would help propel Dewey into a spotlight that made him the intellectual face of a growing nation that was quickly becoming a leading world superpower.

While at Johns Hopkins University, Dewey was introduced to Pragmatic philosophy when he took a logic course with Pierce, and was exposed to James' monumental work *The*

Principles of Psychology. This spurred Dewey's intellectual development, leading him to rapidly shed Hegelianism in favor of "instrumentalism," a position that holds that thinking is an activity which, at its best, is directed toward solving problems rather than creating abstract metaphysical systems" ("John Dewey."). Susan Haack writes of Dewey's instrumentalism,

He seeks an 'integration... between man's beliefs about the world in which he lives and his beliefs about the values and purposes that should direct his conduct'... This intertwines with the stress on continuity that also runs throughout his work, and with his distrust of traditional philosophical dualism: mind versus body, theory versus practice, reason versus experience, and fact versus value. (34)

The Educator: John Dewey

Dewey was an incredibly (perhaps excessively) prolific philosopher and his work addressed a myriad of topics. Dewey's complete works, as published by Southern Illinois University Press, fill an astonishing thirty-eight volumes, with the average volume being about five hundred pages. It is not just his prolific nature, however, that led him to be such an enduring figure in the history of American philosophy, but rather his acuity and insight into life's perplexities and the innovative solutions he offered.

Integral to Dewey's overall project was his pursuit of the creation of a comprehensive philosophy of education. It is important here to again remember the time that he was writing in; Dewey was an academic primarily during the Progressive Era (1890's – 1920) in American history, marked by widespread social activism and reform. The extensive change that Dewey grew up in brought about many significant problems, revolving around industrialization, urbanization, increased immigration, unequal wealth distribution, and increased class stratification. These issues encouraged Dewey to become invested in social reform, much like many of his academic peers were at the time. Along with his fellow Pragmatist William James, he subscribed to the idea of *meliorism*, which is the belief that the world can be made better

through human effort. In a philosophy un-tethered from static ideals, it was important for the ethical project of these Pragmatist thinkers to assert that effort must be made within a changing system to direct it positively. In *The Public and Its Problems*, Dewey explains,

It is not the business of political philosophy and science to determine what the state in general should or must be. What they may do is to aid in creation of methods such that experimentation may go on less blindly, less at the mercy of accident, more intelligently, so that men may learn from their errors and profit by their successes. (34)

For Dewey, not only were these methods necessary for the education system, but the school was exactly the place where this experimentation could take place. Dewey would later open a number of ‘laboratory schools,’ institutions in which he could perform practical experiments with the application of his theories.

One of Dewey’s most important and well-known works is *Democracy & Education*, a pillaring text in the history of educational theory published in 1916. Written relatively early on in his publishing career, Dewey had already published several small works or essays on education, but this was his first work to focus on education with such depth and scope.

Dewey plainly states, in the Preface to *Democracy and Education*, the influences and issues he wishes to address in his work...

“..the philosophy stated in this book connects the growth of democracy with the development of the experimental method in the sciences, evolutionary ideas in the biological sciences, and the industrial reorganization, and is concerned to point out the changes in subject matter and method of education indicated by these developments.” (iii)

The influence of previous developments in the philosophic, intellectual, and scientific world can be clearly seen in both content and structure of the text, but always in a fashion unique to Dewey. Reflecting both the historical and transformative focus of Hegel’s philosophy and the

large time-scale implied by Darwin's evolutionary theory, Dewey embraces a very strong sense of continuity. Dewey, by focusing on renewal, is responding to the larger historical arc present in Hegel and Darwin's work, both of which stressed progress over time. His educational philosophy does not 'start' with the child in the classroom; he begins with the pure concept of education describing not only its historical and contemporary function, but its biological and historic necessity.

Part II

Live and Learn: The Social Nature of Education

“It is the very nature of life to strive to continue in being. Since this continuance can be secured only by constant renewals, life is a self-renewing process. What nutrition and reproduction are to physiological life, education is to social life.”
(Democracy & Education 9)

When introducing the final chapters of *Democracy and Education*, Dewey offers a brief summary of the text so far, in which he states that the beginning chapters “deal with education as a social need and function” (321). This emphasis on the social aspect of learning and education is a central tenet to his views on educational philosophy, and one of the most important.

He begins the text with a biologically orientated statement that “[t]he most notable distinctions between living and inanimate things is that the former maintain themselves by renewal” (1). He expands this with a brief discussion of growth and the way in which living things expand energy controlling or influencing the environment, concluding: “Life is a self-renewing process through action upon the environment” (2).

Already this reflects the scientific nature of early Pragmatism, and to a lesser degree the increasing public fascination with biology, but it is noteworthy that the ‘renewal’ of ethical

philosophy would become the prominent focus of European philosophy after the devastation of both world wars. Indeed, the text discusses life in terms of resistance and endurance, death and rebirth, reproduction and adaptation.

Dewey follows this with an upward movement to human experience and the social nature of education, “[w]ith the renewal of physical existence goes, in the case of human beings, the re-creation of beliefs, ideals, hopes, happiness, misery, and practices. The continuity of any experience, through renewing of the social groups, is a literal fact. Education, in its broadest sense, is the means of this social continuity of life” (2). Children must be inducted into social membership through the assimilation of customs, attitudes, ideas, and knowledge, a process continued by following generations.

The education of these “immature members” of a social group is the means for the constant self-renewal of communities (10). Without this, even the “most civilized group will relapse into barbarism and then into savagery” (4). It is “the constant reweaving of the social fabric” through the “genuine and thorough transmission” of ideas and practices that allow societies to continue (3). This inherently social nature of education in Dewey’s philosophy follows, in some ways, central ideas of early Pragmatism. For Peirce, there was a communal focus in proper, scientific inquiry and the establishment of truth statements about the universe. James would stress the practical application of these truth statements in their ability to improve life.

Dewey is quick to note that not only is education necessary for societies but for individual survival as well, as the young “could not acquire the rudimentary abilities necessary for physical existence” without social learning (4), again rooting learning in a biological and environmental way. Learning is almost always both personal and social to some degree, and it is

always occurring. Dewey stresses that education should not be understood solely by mere acquisition of knowledge or ability. Following the biological perspective that the work opens with, all learning is tied to biological and social living, and should be seen as almost organic itself: constantly growing or fading, shifting direction and purpose, serving a multitude of functions with a variety of abilities. This focus is seen when he summarizes the first chapter, writing,

By various agencies, unintentional and designed, a society transforms uninitiated and seemingly alien beings into robust trustees of its own resources and ideals. Education is thus a fostering, a nurturing, a cultivating, process. All of these words mean that it implies attentions to the conditions of growth. We also speak of rearing, raising, bringing up – words which express the difference of level which education aims to cover...When we have the outcome of the process in mind, we speak of education as shaping, forming, molding activity – that is, a shaping into the standard form of social activity. (10)

When education becomes entrenched and stagnant in content and method, when it fails to adapt and survive within new physical and intellectual environments, it serves its many functions less and less. Although the pure preservation of historical knowledge and similar pursuits are necessary and valuable, the functions that benefit most from education absolute and rigid in method, structure, content, and purpose, all too often serve the needs of oppression, prejudice, despotism, and war.

Approaching Social Structures

“...even in a gang of thieves, we find some interest held in common...” (D&E 83)

Considering the social nature of learning, a discussion of education even in its most basic sense obviously necessitates some analysis of social groupings. Dewey immediately problematizes the term *society*, and by extension most similar terms, when he writes, “Society is one word, but many things” (82). He continues,

Men associate together in all kinds of ways and for all kinds of purposes. One man is concerned in a multitude of diverse groups, in which his associates may be quite different. It often seems as if they had nothing in common except that they are modes of associated life. Within every larger social organization there are numerous minor groups; not only political subdivisions, but industrial, scientific, religious, associations... In many modern states and in some ancient, there is a great diversity of populations, of varying languages, religions, moral codes, and traditions. From this standpoint, many a minor political unit, one of our large cities for example, is a congeries of loosely associated societies, rather than an inclusive and permeating community of action and thought. (82)

Terms like society and community are thus ambiguous or misleading, “for they have a tendency to make us think there is a single thing corresponding to the single word” (82, 20). They are almost always taken in “a eulogistic or normative sense” (82), where they are understood not in a practical sense but by a framework of ideological definition. Often, and problematic for an adequate conception of social groupings, they are defined by qualities such as “praiseworthy community of purpose and welfare, loyalty to public ends, mutuality of sympathy” (82). When we “look at the facts which the term *denotes* instead of confining our attention to its intrinsic *connotation*, we find not unity, but a plurality of societies, good and bad” (82), as seen before.

In another typical Pragmatist move, Dewey subtly shifts the focus on society as a static group of qualities to one much more active; social groups must be defined in large degree by the nature, purpose, and method of cohabitation and the activities of living, and not solely by descriptors such as size, or geography. An example of this can be seen when he writes, “Now in any social group whatever, even in a gang of thieves, we find some interest held in common, and we find a certain amount of interaction and cooperative intercourse with other groups” (83). It is interest and purpose that in large part defines a social grouping, as well as the nature or style of their interactions with other groups.

This again follows Pragmatism's focus on the active over the passive, where ideas and truths are understood through and valued by the way in which they determine the actions we take in living, not by syllogistic reasoning or the internal consistency of statements. Such a shift in focus was likely influenced heavily by the way in which Pierce and subsequently James had reconceptualized the meaning of truth.

Methods of Learning: Informal Education

“...not only does social life demand teaching and learning for its own permanence, but the very process of living together educates.” (D&E 6)

After a very naturalist and environmental consideration of education, Dewey then designates two general ways in which learning occurs, although by its nature there is no absolute demarcation between the two. There is first the informal, which incorporates all the unintentional learning that happens during the process of socialization, as well as that which happens simply during the process of living.

Informal learning happens primarily through the processes of socialization, where “what is required is a transformation of the quality of experience till it partakes in the interests, purposes, and ideas current in the social group” (11). In speaking of “savage groups”, Dewey writes of their methods,

They have no special devices, material, or institutions for teaching save in connection with initiation ceremonies by which the youth are inducted into full social membership. For the most part, they depend upon children learning the customs of the adults, acquiring their emotional set and stock of ideas, by sharing in what the elders are doing. In part, this sharing is direct, taking part in the occupations of adults and thus serving an apprenticeship; in part, it is indirect, through the dramatic plays in which children reproduce the actions of grown-ups and thus learn to know what they are like. (7)

That this statement speaks from an outdated and somewhat inaccurate framework is less important than the general idea, true in almost all situations, that informal education happens largely through forms of imitation that reflect both survival techniques and social customs. There is the play of children imitating adults, which although it decreases in direct value as a society advances continues to happen for quite some time, nonetheless. There are various forms of natural social imitation that are unconscious as well as intentional, that help even the earliest and simplest social structures survive, communicate, and eventually develop.

Much of early tool making was likely demonstrated and copied more than it was communicated through other means, as well as methods of hunting and gathering food and water. As the need for skill specialization increases in a society most appear to develop forms of apprenticeship that place a singular or small number of students under a person of some talent or ability, such as artisans, spiritual figures, early keepers of knowledge, and political leaders. Even here the figure more typically demonstrates their technique through action than they create a body of knowledge that is passed on as instructions, theory, or the like.

The simple growth of an individual within an environment is also crucial, as development occurs in response and reaction to the many particular qualities of any environment, both of the natural world and of social structures, especially those most local. The characteristics of an environment, its natural traits such as climate, type and quantity of resources, the amount and form of geographical space, local flora and fauna, and so on, are all of massive importance in the direction social groups tend to develop. As the earliest development occurs further changes are influenced by previous ones. Forms of language and communication, customs, spiritualities and religions, political ideologies, philosophical views, and everything similar all function in a state of constant interaction, informing and determining the others in inextricable ways.

In Dewey's words, the environment,

...call[s] out certain responses... the particular medium in which an individual exists leads him to see and feel one thing rather than another; it leads him to have certain plans in order that he may act successfully with others; it strengthens some beliefs and weakens others as a condition of winning the approval of others. Thus it gradually produces in him a certain system of behavior, a certain disposition of action. (11)

He immediately notes however that,

The words 'environment,' 'medium' denote something more than surroundings which encompass an individual. They denote the specific continuity of the surroundings with his own active tendencies... In brief, the environment consists of those conditions that promote or hinder, stimulate or inhibit, the *characteristic* activities of a living being. (11)

The individual forms their own relation to their environment, they care about and are concerned with some aspects more than others. 'Environment', in this sense, includes not only the physically immediate, for "some things which are remote in space and time from a living creature, especially a human creature, may form his environment even more truly than some of the things close to him" (11). Thus, the environment of an astronomer includes the physically local telescope they use, but also the stars and celestial phenomena that they observe, calculate, appreciate, or otherwise concern themselves with, despite spatial difference. And for the 'antiquarian' it is the temporally distant "...remote epoch of human life with which he is concerned", that also defines his environment (11).

Dewey briefly summarizes these ideas, writing

Our net result thus far is that social environment forms the mental and emotional disposition of behavior in individuals by engaging them in activities that arouse and strengthen certain impulses, that have certain purposes and entail certain consequences... Some kinds of participation in the life of those with whom the individual is connected are inevitable; with respect to them, the social environment exercises an educative or formative influence unconsciously and apart from any set purpose. (16)

This organic notion of a social group's development in response to the environment and to previous changes does bear some resemblance to the way Darwinian natural selection informs evolution (this works far less well with contemporary understandings of evolution). Perhaps natural selection's emphasis on the success or failure of specific entities to pass on genetic material even encouraged Dewey to stress that education not only allows for societies to develop and 'move forward', but to sustain themselves at all. Much like an individual cannot survive without some learning from already existent persons, a society without education will relapse into less sophisticated forms until eventual collapse.

We cannot expect history to provide clear and unambiguous examples of this due to its theoretical nature and the presence of too many influencing factors; however, history has recorded the growth, advancement, decline, and collapse of many societies, some extremely large in scale. While factors like war, disease, famine, shifts in climate, and changes in amount of local resources are most often the primary cause of such collapse, there does appear to be a strong correlation between a society stagnant or in decline and a lack of proper education.

Some Dangers in Informal Education

Even brief consideration of Dewey's educational theory reveals some of the many problems that challenge desirable, meaningful education, both formal and informal. When picturing historically early education, among relatively small groups typically labeled as 'tribes', there is the danger of a given group's insularity. This danger occurs not only with lack of contact or deliberate intellectual homogeneity, but by the simple nature of social learning.

As an individual develops within a framework of socialization, there is the danger that they may only adopt certain 'external habits of action' so as to allow for cohabitation, without adopting the intent or purpose behind such actions. In "...too many cases... the activity of the

immature human being is simply played upon to secure habits which are useful. *He is trained like an animal rather than educated like a human being...* to get happiness or to avoid the pain of failure he has to act in a way agreeable to others” (13; my emphasis). The individual “...is not a partner in a shared activity”, for if he was integrated as a member, “...he would, in engaging in the conjoint activity, have the same interest in its accomplishment which other have. *He would share their ideas and emotions*” (13; my emphasis).

This adoption and internalization of the ‘ideas and emotions’ of the social group carries its own dangers, any time the individual fails to honestly critique and question these motivating factors. However, it is an even more primary danger that he would never internalize these factors at all. Wherever action is undertaken solely because it is in agreement with the group, there is little or no opportunity for an internal dialogue about the value, legitimacy, or consequences of the actions. It may take stupendous experiences to shock an individual into reconsideration of those actions which for them simply allows for continued existence within the social group. When the principle motivating factors of the social group have been internalized as part of a larger process of socialization into full group participation, there arises the possibility for a more serious contemplation. This contemplation is necessary for evaluating personal and social ideals and dispositions, and is perhaps the most basic and crucial factor in both personal and social development.

This ‘problem of intent’ is intimately coupled with an equally fundamental issue involving the horizons of possible experience within social groups. Dewey writes, “The way our group or class does things tends to determine the proper objects of attention, and thus to prescribe the directions and limits of observation and memory. What is strange or foreign (that is to say outside the activities of the groups) tends to be morally forbidden and intellectually

suspect” (17). Critical here is the idea that this aversion to the foreign, while often intentional, is also a simple consequence of a given group’s focus.

The most notable example here may be that of language. Not only are languages generally distinct to social groups of a given size, but their content and even function reflect a development in relation to environmental conditions, practical and social needs, political and aesthetic stances, etc. Language is “...formed in the ordinary intercourse of life, carried on not as a set means of instruction but as a social necessity” (17). It forms and develops in response to specific circumstances and needs, and in so doing creates an ideological framework embedded as deep as basic grammar, vocabulary, and the style of the written word.

This framework then informs an individual’s world views, as most thought happens linguistically. The danger then is not an aversion to that which is foreign, but an inability to perceive, process, and understand beyond one’s language. This barrier of communication is remarkably fundamental, especially when considering that potential for individuals within the same social group to have significantly different interpretations of the same vocabulary and speech. It is largely communication, and the broadening of experience, that is required however to overcome this barrier, as internal dialogue and self-analysis are highly susceptible to the limitations of any given language. New experiences beyond the bounds of a local social group brings to light much that was unseen, and can call into question that which was believed implicitly.

Methods of Learning: Formal Education

“... it is found necessary to provide a special social environment which shall especially look after nurturing the capacities of the immature.” (D&E 22)

As societies become increasingly complex, the “gap between the capacities of the young and the concerns of adults widens... Much of what adults do is so remote in space and *in meaning* that playful imitation is less and less adequate to reproduce *its spirit*” (8; my emphasis). Formal modes of education become more and more necessary. Otherwise, “it is not possible to transmit all the resources and achievements of a complex society” (8).

To this end, “Intentional agencies - schools - and explicit material - studies - are devised. The task of teaching certain things is delegated to a special group of persons” (8). Formalized education also allows for the mastering of “books and the symbols of knowledge”, a necessary skill as civilizations advance (8). This presence of written symbols is not only a primary focus in formal education, which teaches literacy in a written language so that it may then use it in further education, but may be the main instigating factor in the creation of school in the first place. “Roughly speaking,” Dewey writes, “[schools] come into existence when social traditions are so complex that a considerable part of the social store is committed to writing and transmitted through written symbols” (19). This is by no means however, the only function of a school.

Dewey then lays out three functions that are ‘sufficiently specific’, as compared to more informal modes of education, to be worth discussing. Because a developed society is too complex to possibly transmit in its entirety, information must be segmented into sets or portions, and “...assimilated piecemeal, in a gradual and graded way” (20). Even then, it is not possible for all that much information to be transmitted, and such a great deal of potential information is overwhelming in sheer scope to a child, resulting in confusion. In this disarray it becomes

almost impossible to determine the need, value, relevancy, or importance of any area of information, and natural limitations prevent one from sharing in each of them. Consequently, “[t]he first office of the social organ we call the school is to provide a simplified environment. It selects the features which are fairly fundamental and capable of being responded to by the young. Then it establishes a progressive order, using the factors first acquired as means of gaining insight into what is more complicated” (20).

This is not simply about what information is most necessary or how best to transmit mass data. This education is part of a living process of growth and development, and the greater importance in this area of schooling is to have a child participate in knowledge in such a way that the *meaning* behind the information is communicated, with this meaning then becoming part of the child’s mental disposition. In much the same way informal education socializes an individual, the goal of formal education ought to be the development of a critical yet cooperative mind, one that benefits not just the individual but their environment as well.

Following this emphasis on the development of a child’s mental disposition, it is suitable that the second function of formal education in a school environment is to “...eliminate, so far as possible, the unworthy features of the existing environment from influence upon mental habitudes” (20). The selection of information “aims not only at simplifying but at weeding out what is undesirable” (20). Ultimately, “By selecting the best for its exclusive use, [the school] strives to reinforce the power of this best. As a society becomes more enlightened, it realizes that it is responsible *not* to transmit and conserve the whole of its existing achievement, but only such as make for a better future society” (20).

Lastly, and of particular interest, Dewey claims “it is the office of the school environment to balance the various elements in the social environment, and to see to it that each individual

gets an opportunity to escape from the limitations of the social group in which he was born, and to come into contact with a broader environment” (20). Schools then should compensate for the unequal opportunities afforded to children of different social classes, a key issue of the text and Dewey’s overall educational philosophy.

Some Dangers in Formal Education

Dewey notes quite early that “there are conspicuous dangers attendant upon the transition from indirect to formal education” (8). Formal education and instruction “easily becomes remote and dead – abstract and bookish”. Against this he writes, “Sharing in actual pursuit, whether directly or vicariously in play, is at least personal and vital” (8), benefits that help compensate for the limited opportunities available in forms of informal education. He continues describing the possible dangers,

There is the standing danger that the material of formal instruction will be merely the subject matter of the schools, isolated from the subject matter of life-experience... Thus we reach the ordinary notion of education: the notion which ignores its social necessity and its identity with all human association that affects conscious life, and which identifies it with imparting information about remote matters and the conveying of learning through verbal signs: the acquisition of literacy. (8-9)

It is clear then that education, for Dewey, is intimately tied to the nature, circumstances, needs, and goals of life as it is at the given time. “When the acquiring of information and of technical intellectual skill do not influence the formation of a social disposition” Dewey continues, “ordinary vital experience fails to gain in meaning...” (9). Again, education is tied to living, thinking, and acting, to the emotions and ideals that influence and determine action. When schooling fails to address the circumstances of real life, it “...creates only ‘sharps’ in learning – that is, egoistic specialists” (9). Specialized or highly technical education is still only valuable in the ways it will benefit life.

This primary relationship between education and life is easily lost within educational institutions. Places of schooling are often isolated from the larger social sphere, especially throughout history, where religious institutions such as churches and monasteries were prominent places of education. Physical distance or at least segregation worked as a physical manifestation of ideological views that see a separation between the aims and contents of learning and the labor of social life. The value of any education is measured, by Dewey, in the concrete functions it serves and gains it provides within actual living. As life changes, so must education. As potential foci for the stagnation of educational development, formal institutions must be carefully and intentionally designed, evaluated, and modified.

Dewey mentions that with the increase in complexity of a society the “task of teaching certain things is delegated to a special group of persons” (8), which brings with it an immediate and obvious problem. These instructors will not only vary in quality of ability and depth of knowledge, but will be unique from each other in methodology and technique. Formal institutions and standards can be adopted to perform a degree of quality control in instruction and also to mitigate the differences between these trained instructors, especially poignant today with regards to the debate over the value of standardized testing, a mode of education that encourages not only the homogeneity of teaching styles and information, but that through its very structure demands the learning of information with the ultimate purpose of succeeding in these exams. This is markedly different from modes of informal education, where knowledge is “put into practice; it is transmuted into character; it exists with the depth of meaning that attaches to its coming within urgent daily interests” (8).

Dewey summarizes this when he writes, “As societies become more complex in structure and resources, the need of formal teaching and training grows in extent, there is the

danger of creating an undesirable split between the experience gained in more direct associations and what is acquired in school” (9), where ‘direct associations’ refers to the interpersonal and highly social nature of informal education. This problem is so imperative that he claims, “one of the weightiest problems with which philosophy of education has to cope is the method of keeping a proper balance between the informal and the formal, the incidental and the intentional, modes of education” (9).

In a pressing close to the first chapter, he claims that the danger of this ‘undesirable split’ “was never greater than at the present time, on account of the rapid growth in the last few centuries of knowledge and technical modes of skill” (9), a danger that has no doubt only grown since the publishing of the work a century ago.

A Common Goal: Societies and Social Development

Although Dewey puts great effort into analyzing education as it has and was occurring at the time, he never strays far from the ethical consequences of education in its many forms. And while education may often serve relatively clear functions, such as socialization, this does not mean that these common functions are the only, or the best, aspects of it. In order to bridge the gap between what education seems to be and have been in the world and what education *ought to be*, Dewey begins with his analysis of social groups. As education cannot be considered apart from the manner in which it will be taught and the environment the teaching will happen in, developing clear and quality goals requires building up from the fundamental nature of education.

Following the immense role that environment - physical, mental, and social - plays in education and learning, Dewey begins by emphasizing the degree to which immediate social groups will influence education. Education will “vary with the quality of life which prevails in a

group” (81). Examining these different groups and judging the moral value of the society that results, allows both for statement about how education should be taught and what it should teach. Dewey frames this neatly when he writes, “The problem is to extract the desirable traits of forms of community life which actually exist, and employ them to criticize undesirable features and suggest improvement” (83). Traits, along with judgments about their moral value, can be examined by the degree to which they promote or inhibit the development of a society.

Although it may seem logically problematic to understand ‘development’ in this context as generally morally progressive, Dewey seems to intentionally use this term with such connotations, rather than re-appropriate a more esoteric term or invent a new one. It refers not only to scientific, intellectual, or technological developments that were rampant in his lifetime, but to the idea that true development is a self-reinforcing movement.

A society ‘develops’ in a forward, desirable motion when its new form emphasizes and encourages that which will lead to further development. This development is ethical because it requires largely the same qualities of openness, communication, and malleability that enhance inter-personal relationships and promote growth within a society. In a meta-ethical sense, development becomes a central facet of ‘the good’, as it increasingly requires and promotes qualities of inclusivity, openness, communication, and so on. Conversely, these terms continue to be understood as ‘good’ partly because they foster development, as ethics demands flexibility and malleability to adapt to new demands and needs.

When a society embraces these qualities, it is more likely to develop beneficial advancements, ones that improve the quality of life. When done properly, these improvements encourage those qualities fundamental to ethical movement, and this more open, cooperative society is then more able to develop. They are inextricable from each other, reciprocal and

codependent; in essence they are mostly the same. Technical development is judged not by abstract principles or increases in the potential to control and alter the environment or other demonstrations of power, but by the concrete benefits it provides for a society. These benefits serve both individual and social group, for the same essential qualities promote personal and societal growth.

He derives two principal standards, based upon traits universal to all or most social groups. Even in a 'gang of thieves', there will be an "interest held in common", and a "certain amount of interaction and cooperative intercourse with other groups" (83). Because they are largely universal, these traits provide solid footing from which to develop educational theory. To a large degree, the development of an 'advanced' culture is predicated on adequate approaches to these traits. More precisely, Dewey approaches this evaluation via two questions: "How numerous and varied are the interests which are consciously shared? How full and free is the interplay with other forms of association?" (83).

To hold a common interest means more than simply having the same goal as others in the group, for individuals can share the same goal of survival or self-concern only to remain at odds with each other. To hold common interests in a way that benefits a society, allowing it to develop further, individuals must not be coerced into beliefs or standards but must instead be invested in shared goals, based upon shared values. The individual must, to a degree, act from the same ideas and emotions that are the chief motivating factors for others of the group (13-14).

To have many values in common, "all the members of the group must have an equable opportunity to receive and to take from others. There must be a large variety of shared undertakings and experiences" (84). This receiving and taking, although it will be shown to require economic and social equality, specifically refers to the giving and receiving of experience

or experiential information. A lack of “free and equitable discourse”, where such discourse “springs from a variety of shared interests”, will lead to narrow and unbalanced intellectual stimulation (85). As activity and intellectual stimulation are restricted, action tends to become routine, grueling, unrewarding, aimless, capricious, and even disastrous (85). Individuals will not share goals to the same degree, they will not form as significant connections with others, and their myopic worldview will inhibit ethical growth.

Compounding the importance of new and varied social experiences between individuals for the promotion of shared values and goals, social groups as a whole must also interact in a similar manner with other groups. When isolation, exclusiveness, or absolute interests reign in a society, that group will shut itself out of “...full interaction with other groups, so that its prevailing purpose is the protection of what it has got, instead of reorganization and progress through wider relationships” (86). Such isolation and lack of inter-group interaction “makes for rigidity and formal institutionalizing of life, for static and selfish ideals within the group” (86). Again, because Dewey understands development with reference to an essential purpose, that development should only serve to open up groups and individuals and therefore promote further growth, he is able to separate pure technical advancement from desirable, progressive development.

The problem of ‘static and selfish ideals’ isn’t only that it may prevent technological advancements that are spurred by exposure to new ideas and experiences. When such ideals create a society, it will be not only unethical in specific actions or dealings but will often become its own undoing. Eventually, a completely closed and intransigent society will begin to crumble, as its absoluteness turns brittle and unsustainable. The injection of new ideas and experiences through intra and inter-group communication and the development of shared goals and values are

the necessary elements that allow a society sufficient flexibility to be capable of long-term survival.

A Way of Life: Democratic Principles

Immediately after providing these two criterion of communal interests and inter-group communications with which to judge a society, toward the goal of extracting “the desirable traits of forms of community life” and employing them “to criticize undesirable features and suggest improvement” (83), Dewey notes that these measures point towards what he calls a democratic society (86). He writes,

The first signifies not only more numerous and more varied points of shared common interest, but greater reliance upon the recognition of mutual interests as a factor in social control. The second means not only freer interaction between social groups (once isolated so far as intention could keep up a separation) but change in social habit – its continuous readjustment through meeting the new situations produced by varied intercourse. (86-87)

That Dewey is so quick to associate these elements with democracy lies not only in the role they play within political ideology. For Dewey, democracy cannot be reduced to a form of political structure stripped of its relation to the experienced world. “Popular suffrage” cannot serve as the sole qualifier for democracy not only because of its limited focus within just the political sphere, but because democracy extends beyond and requires more than mere political structure. In essence, and in form within a truly developing society, democracy is “more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience” (87). In another example of Pragmatic thinking, delineating democracy is not about establishing an indisputable, precise definition, but instead centers around assembling descriptors into a depiction that has a gainful function, one that is testable and capable of modulation, and that promotes true development.

For Dewey, a democracy depends for its continued existence on its presence in the social and personal spheres. It must promote, foster, maintain, and develop certain social behaviors, ideas, and goals; if it does not it will stagnate and decline, unable to adapt to changes. Democracy in this form, however, cannot develop from intellectual progress alone. From this perspective, Dewey may have seen the eventual collapse of Athenian and Roman democracy to be a result of those societies' inability or lack of will to develop further. Progress may have continued in its many varied forms, but these cultures did not develop democratically, regardless of the role it played in political or philosophical ideology. Democratic development requires a continual openness to and infusion of new experiences, dialogue, people, and cultures. Democracy itself arises from advancements that force these new experiences. Dewey writes of this,

The widening of the area of shared concerns, and the liberation of a greater diversity of personal capacities which characterize a democracy, are not of course the product of deliberation and conscious effort. On the contrary, they were caused by the development of modes of manufacture and commerce, travel, migration, and intercommunication which flowed from the command of science over natural energy. But after greater individualization on one hand, and a broader community of interest on the other have come into existence, *it is a matter of deliberate effort to sustain and extend them.* (87; my emphasis)

The ideas of democracy, its early forms, and even the basic social outlooks that undergird it, all arise at first in response to these new experiences. Its implementation, maintenance, and longevity however are dependent upon 'deliberate effort', whether it is fully conscious or not. The emotional and social orientations that eventually define democratic living come into being much earlier. But this also does not ensure either its development or even its continuance. These orientations must be constantly cultivated and re-affirmed by all, and must be impressed upon the young or new. Because of its existence within emotional and social principles,

democracy depends intrinsically upon education, in all its forms. A typical democratic society will thus strive to promote these principles within the institutions of formal education.

Education and Democracy

This dependence on education is by no means limited to democracies. Indeed, many forms of political or social extreme depend upon education in order to perpetuate and instill certain principles. *Democracy & Education* was written and published before the rise of prominent or visible forms of totalitarianism, although revolution would soon pull Russia out of the First World War. Within the next two decades, and those that would follow, countries around the world would turn increasingly to political extremes: racial and nationalist totalitarianism in Nazi Germany, communist totalitarianism in the Soviet Union and later the People's Republic of China, despotic fascism in states such as Italy and Finland, the guerilla communist revolutions across the world in Cuba, Korea, Vietnam, and many others, the secret police state of East Germany, and so on. Dewey then does not address the roles education played in these societies within *Democracy and Education*. It is noteworthy however that nations of communist totalitarianism were also extremist in education. Even when it took an anti-intellectual form, as in Maoist China, '*education*' as *socialization* was fundamentally necessary to hold these nations together. Had it been written later Dewey's text would undoubtedly have had to face these issues.

Many of these political extremes advocated or demanded principles decidedly opposed not just to democracy but to democratic living as Dewey understood it. Many are so obviously anti-humanitarian or even outright inhumane that they do not require examination here. Instead it is necessary to note one of the primary issues education faces in helping establish and maintain a democratic society. Dewey writes, "One of the fundamental problems of education in and for a

democratic society is set by the conflict of a nationalistic and a wider social aim” (97). It is no surprise that nationalism appears as a social issue when considering the fervent state of many nations leading up to the First World War. Instead, this marked similarity between Dewey’s time and ours only serves to reinforce his belief that education must be constant and progressive, to allow for a truly developing society.

Educational aim is thus a key component of democracy. When the social aim of education is conflated with a nationalistic aim, such as in 19th century Europe, the *meaning* of the former is obscured (97). The meaning of the social aim, the ultimate purpose with which society must concern itself for the true development of a progressive democratic civilization, cannot become part of or subservient to other interests, particularly when those interests are ‘external’, when they are too far removed from democratic principles of community and communication. Dewey even questions whether an educational system conducted by the national state can function without restricting, constraining, or corrupting the “full social ends of the educative process” (97).

Despite this, a state sponsored system of formal education is presumably still necessary for mass promotion of democratic ideals. Long and short term flexibility, attention to individuality and communal idiosyncrasies, and an educational aim focusing on democratic principles all serve to mitigate the inherent problems and dangers of such institutions. In this sense formal institutions must be accommodating or adaptable to the individuality of students, so that it is possible to instill a feeling of participation, community, and cooperation along with some set of shared social aims. This society as a whole must be able to adapt to new conditions, its must be capable of *genuine* change, and thus the individuals that are the catalysts for this social movement must be able to advance and fight for these changes without irrevocably

damaging the society. Whatever wounds may be opened during such changes must be mendable, or the society must be capable of 'rebirth' in such a way as to maintain its democratic principles.

Dewey summarizes,

“A society which makes provisions for participation in its good of all its members on equal terms and which secures flexible readjustment of its institutions through interaction of the different forms of associated life is in so far democratic. Such a society must have a type of education which gives individuals a personal interest in social relationships and control, and the habits of mind which secure social changes without introducing disorder” (99).

The 'full social end' of democratic education is not limited to the promotion of socially democratic principles, although this is its essence. In a similar way to how 'true development' not only promotes community and communication, but in so doing also provides the avenues for further development, education, in fostering a continued capacity for growth, also provides and stimulates desire for further education. This aspect of education is essential, for the democratic spirit *cannot* be reduced to a set of democratic principles that are seen as permanent, for this will only lead to doctrine. The reevaluation of current democratic principles happens at an intersection of social concern and explorative learning, something that formal education must promote as an essential idea. The role of continual learning is so crucial for the possibility of long term democracy that Dewey writes, “...we are not concerned, therefore, with finding an end outside of the educative process to which education is subordinate” (100). Learning and the desire to learn are core aims of education, for it is these that make democratic societies possible at all.

Democratic education must face challenges to its essence on two key fronts: the external, or the national, global scale, and the internal, the issues of social structure within a society. For

the state of the world in his time, and no less relevant today, Dewey considers these two fronts to be defined externally by issues of nationalism and patriotism and internally by class and economic disparity.

Part III

Either One or the Other: The Problem of Dualism

“...these various dualisms culminate in a sharp demarcation of individual minds from the world, and hence from one another.” (D&E 291)

The dualism of traditional philosophy, although intensely intellectual, and the tendency for human beings to define their experiences in terms of binary opposition have real-world repercussions that manifest themselves in every area of experience. For Dewey this dualism is a source of erroneous thinking and the consequences of this thinking’s application are so problematic he claims, “It would be impossible to state adequately the evil results which have flowed from this dualism of mind and body, much less to exaggerate them” (141). Unsurprisingly then, the problematic of dualism is the source for many social and individual issues.

While it is the source of some erroneous thinking, the tendency of human beings towards dualistic thinking is a common, almost natural result of reflection upon experience. Dewey writes, “When we reflect upon an experience instead of just having it, we inevitably distinguish between our own attitude and the objects toward which we sustain the attitude... Such reflection upon experience gives rise to a distinction of *what* we experience (the *experienced*) and the *experiencing* – the *how*” (166-167). There arises a distinction between our actions of experience, seeing, hearing, loving, hating, imaging, etc., and the objects of our experience, the thing that is seen, heard, loved, hated, imagined, and so on (167). While this distinction will show itself to be

problematic, even disastrous at times, its greatest danger lies not in its existence within the realm of thought, where it can at times be useful, but in the belief that it is a ‘real’ or ‘true’ description of existence. This premise is summarized when Dewey writes,

This distinction is so natural and so important for certain purposes, that we are only too apt to regard it as a separation in existence and not as a distinction in thought. Then we make a division between a self and the environment or world. This separation is the root of the dualism of method and subject matter. That is, we assume that knowing, feeling, willing, etc., are things which belong to the self or mind in its isolation, and which then may be brought to bear upon an independent subject matter. We assume that the things which belong in isolation to the self or mind have their own laws of operation irrespective of the modes of active energy of the object. (167)

The many dualisms that arise from reflection mend their way together, to ultimately “culminate in one [separation] between knowing and doing, theory and practice, between mind as the end and spirit of action and the body as its organ and means” (336). While such thinking may prove useful in the development of pure method, dualistic thinking divides necessarily connected experiences and actions, thinking from doing.

When examined, it should become clear that there is not only a relationship, which would only reflect an already assumed distinction, but a *continuity* between experiencing and the experienced. There is not one without the other. The acts of experiencing necessarily imply something experienced, and things are always brought to us by experience. And to experience the world necessarily implies some act of experiencing, even if passive, even if unintentional, even if undesirable. In this vein Dewey writes, “Experience, in short, is not a combination of mind and world, subject and object, method and subject matter, but is a single continuous interaction of a great diversity (literally countless in number) of energies” (167).

Here, Dewey is fully embracing and implementing a key concept in early American Pragmatism. C. S. Pierce, engaging with the traditional dualism of Kant especially, sought to

erase the idea of the 'unknowable' *noumena*, the reality of the world that is beyond experience. Put simply, for Kant, because our modes of experiencing the world already organized and structured experience into the human framework, there was always a 'truth' of things that was beyond human experience. There were things as they were beyond or before the alteration caused by the nature of experience by an organic being.

Pierce would reply that no such 'beyond' existed; the entire truth of an object was contained within the *possible* experiences human being could have in regards to it. Scientific truth was the result of particular human experiences, modified and informed by the principles of the scientific method, such as experimentation, controlled environments, and demonstrated, repeated experience. This grew into a continuity of experience and knowledge, since knowledge was no longer bounded by restrictions of 'mere' experience. From here Pragmatism famously came to espouse a continuity between thought and action, where one always implies the other. Dewey is reflecting all of this when he speaks of a continuity between the acts of experiencing and the experienced world.

Dualistic thinking has been particularly problematic within educational institutions, where 'passive students were, and still are today, meant to 'absorb knowledge directly' instead of engaging in 'fruitful experiences' (140). Consequently, "The intimate union of activity and undergoing its consequences which leads to recognition of meaning is broken; instead we have two fragments: mere bodily action on one side, and meaning directly grasped by 'spiritual' activity on the other" (140-141). Although schools separate, or merely artificially connect, activity and consequence to an extreme degree, it is not only within educational institutions that the loss of meaning occurs. Whenever action is removed from its implications, whenever individuals fail to fully appreciate and understand the continuity in *living* (which contains within

it experience, action, thought, emotions, and so much more), the meaning of action is lost, or at least not fully grasped.

It may seem natural, then, to immediately critique Dewey, who, while speaking at length about the problems of dualism, still organizes much of his arguments and his thinking along dualistic lines. The divide between informal and formal education was discussed previously, and this is followed by a constant bevy of others: play and work, labor and leisure, theory and practice, knowledge and activity, and (in a section *devoted to dualism*), continuity and dualism. This stems from two primary ideas.

There is first the necessity of addressing these issues within the structures that have developed, and it is thus necessary to speak sometimes in dualistic terms, since it was this thinking that led to contemporary forms. Here then, the goal is to analyze the undesirable consequences of this thinking, a process essentially of deconstructing the historical experience and thought process.

Secondly, there is the recognition that dualism, while it is *not* an accurate depiction of existence as such, *is* an accurate depiction of a great deal of experience. That is to say, experience often is, upon reflection, easily organized by binary thinking. This thinking can even be useful. While it is impossible to separate a method of doing something from how it is done, a pure focus on method may cause realizations that are then tempered by the actuality of doing. The danger arises the moment it is believed that dualisms are real, inherent aspects of the world, and not simply divisions made in the process of reflection and thinking.

One Nation, Indivisible/A House Divided: Dualistic Nationalism

“Men still want the crutch of dogma, of beliefs fixed by authority, to relieve them of the trouble of thinking and the responsibility of directing their activity by thought.” (D&E 339)

Despite the appearance of social unity that it provides, nationalism too often proves to be disruptive and hazardous to democratic living. It potentiates the dualistic thinking that opposes self and other, us and them, sometimes to a radical degree. This occurs both ‘externally’, between nations, but also internally, between fellow citizens and countrymen. Ultimately however, it is its relationship to general social aims that makes it particularly problematic.

When embraced as a core component of identity, nationalism dulls the critical active mind that seeks to understand the meaning of social aims, and instead encourages a form of blind faith. This becomes exacerbated when a nation divides itself over this issue, when fervent nationalists come to be opposed to those who remain critical or outright reproachful of the nation-state or its government. As is common with dualistic and binary thinking, the opposition of these groups easily escalates, pushing both sides further from each other, into sometimes irreconcilable territory.

A multiplicity of many degrees of nationalistic thinking is not in itself harmful. Where these ideas are varied, critiqued, and communicated they enhance the social fabric of democratic living, and are necessary for updating political structures. When escalated into an internal binary, it not only divides a nation, but diminishes the possibility for genuinely critical examination from either side. Both the nationalist and the social critic are pressed into ideological camps governed by reactionary oppositions, and both increasingly give way to the base instincts of social rivalry. The avenues for both communication and intelligent critique are increasingly closed off.

Many historical examples of long-term beneficial oppositions exist: one can look at many social movements and see two primary sides, whether it was women's suffrage, civil rights, or current gender theory. These movements did serve to further democratic living and social development within modern nations. But the desirable consequences arose only once the issue began to see some sort of positive realization, when the morally justified side began to see real changes emerge as a consequence of social protest. The challenge to accepted practices and beliefs, the espousal of new ideas and the demands for new ethical needs and stipulations, are desirable. But these are necessary because of the manner in which they promote true and moral development, because in their resolution society becomes more equitable, more democratic, more inclusive. There is no end point, society *must* remain open to change, but neither change nor the plurality of social opposition are desirable simply on their own. They are judged by their consequences, by the degree to which they enhance democratic living for all. That said, no situation could ever arise in which social oppositions are not needed.

When such social differences become mired in a binary opposition, the opportunity for reconciliation and progress is increasingly curtailed. This opposition then comes to be its own enemy; in its extreme form it hinders progress by providing few or no avenues for change. Although in hindsight it is often clear that one side held the moral 'high ground', and that compromise between two groups is not always in the service of democratic living, social justice has not flowered into progress and development until the fires of hostility have begun to die away. This does not mean that capitulation to the other is the answer; it points only to the fact that it is the *consequences* we must look to, the real benefits to be gained. Many times in history it has been necessary for the few to hold fast to their morals against the many, when all

possibility of reconciliation seemed closed. Here the fight may not be for forward development, but to prevent backsliding into less and less democratically equitable ways of life.

Within a state then, nationalism can become a polarized issue, dividing individuals from each other. This is the lesser danger however, for this opposition will almost always leave some space open for critical thinking. When nationalism becomes the adopted ideology of the many, and the few, whether from lack of numbers or oppression, no longer provide any form of significant intellectual difference, the possibility for critical thinking is often lost within the shared social aim. Typically, such shared social aims foster democratic living as they promote unity and encourage cooperation and communication while remaining numerous and varied. Here, when adopted by the 'too many', in an almost blind faith, this shared social focus becomes disastrous. Without the space for public critique, either because of forced limitations or because of a sterile intellectual environment, nationalism erodes the foundational principles of democratic living. The desire for stability becomes an obsession over the status quo, the interactions between groups and individuals serve only to amplify identical ideologies, strangling the possibility for new discourse.

Once embraced in this manner, nationalism quickly becomes the source of incredible inter-national tension. Without room for new dialogue, differences between nations become not sources of new experiences in the service of expanding social consciousness but focal points around which new binary oppositions can be established. The social aim, now a national aim, becomes the preservation of the self, of the nation, against the other, the enemy.

Economic Inequality

Although Dewey names nationalism as one of the main threats to democratic principles in living and in education, it is clear that for him the single greatest problem preventing genuine development in the modern age is economic inequality, whether it is in the form of labor exploitation, class stratification, or one of many others. This inequality threatens the fabric of democratic society, by stifling the communication and communal interest that underpin democratic living. Equally, in so doing it prevents formal education from promoting social principles that would motivate democratic sentiments. While democratic living may require constant effort and reevaluation, a society divided by class secures its own continued existence by stifling the possibility for growth and development.

The manner in which class stratification threatens democratic sentiment is clear when recalling the two principles of democratic living: a varied intercourse stimulating a continuous readjustment of social habit in response to new situations, demands, and needs, and a recognition and acceptance of the way in which shared mutual interests provide social stability and allows for development. These two principles are completely intertwined; the sense of shared interest is perhaps the greatest catalyst for communication between groups and individuals, but the establishment and recognition of these shared interests depends upon dialogue and communication. What works against one aspect will thus work against democratic sentiment at large, and conversely what supports any element of these principles is a step towards democratic living.

For Dewey, it is within an occupation, profession, or vocation that an individual is able to realize their potential and participate in social services, and in so doing achieve happiness. This can only occur however when the occupation and the individual are suitable for each other,

which implies some social role or purpose of the profession, and on the part of the individual implies both ability at and fondness for the work. It is with the social context of this work that an individual finds fulfillment, an idea that is seen throughout many of the philosophers Dewey discusses, especially, albeit differently, in Kant and Hegel. The focus on ability is seen in Dewey's interpretations of Plato, particularly of *The Republic*, where aptitude appropriate work for individuals is a primary source of social stability and organization. Dewey writes,

An occupation is the only thing which balances the distinctive capacity of an individual with his social service. To find out what one is fitted to do and to secure an opportunity to do it is the key to happiness. Nothing is more tragic than failure to discover one's true business in life, or to find that one has drifted or been forced by circumstance into an uncongenial calling. A right occupation means simply that the aptitudes of a person are in adequate play, working with the minimum of friction and the maximum of satisfaction. With reference to other members of a community, this adequacy of action signifies, of course, that they are getting the best service the person can render... [An individual] cannot completely find himself when vocations are looked upon with contempt, and a conventional ideal of a culture which is essentially the same for all is maintained. (309)

This emphasis on the relationship between happiness or contentment and a suitable vocation is emphasized more than once, despite the possibility for the emphasis to obscure other serious forms of suffering, a possibility he is aware of. He writes of this,

Sentimentally, it may seem harsh to say that the greatest evil of the present regime is not found in poverty and in the suffering which it entails, but in the fact that so many persons have callings which make no appeal to them, which are pursued simply for the money reward that accrues. For such callings constantly provoke one to aversion, ill will, and a desire to slight and evade. Neither men's hearts nor their minds are in their work. (317)

Here, Dewey's focus on the ills of inappropriate work over the suffering of the disenfranchised and oppressed may betray an oversight on his part. Although the inauthentic labor of most individuals represents a significant loss in human potential as well as happiness, it is necessary to focus on the suffering of the few and most disenfranchised because it is the

cultivation of these sentiments that promote further democratic feelings and evoke democratic principles. However, much of these precepts can be determined, transmitted, and adopted by individuals through education, direct emotional experience will provide the primary emotional substance that truly imbues democratic principles with meaning. The functional principles of democratic living that support development must be constantly nourished and refreshed by this emotional outreach. It provides for the mental disposition that is most suited to democratic living, and it provides new information and experiences that are necessary for the continued re-appraisal and adaptation of moral systems, social groups, political structures, and educational institutions.

The contempt of vocation Dewey refers to is particularly that espoused by the upper classes against lower class occupations. This itself pivots upon another fundamental dualism that Dewey sees as contributing to and a consequence of class stratification: the opposition of ‘useful labor’ and ‘leisure’. This dualism was cemented in Western culture at least as early as the Greeks, where it was formulated “on the basis of a division of classes into those who had to labor for a living and those who were relieved from this necessity” (251). Labor itself is an obvious necessity, as “Human beings have to live and it requires work to supply the resources of life” (251). In a balanced society, where labor and leisure were shared among all and both were seen as essential to an authentic, fulfilled life, no vocation would be shunned. It is when a division of these interests “coincides with a division of an inferior and a superior social class” that “preparation for useful work [will] be looked down upon with contempt as an unworthy thing...” (251).

Uncooperative Co-option: The Aims of the Social Elite

Despite their contempt for the work of the lower classes, upper class society willfully co-opts their effort and the products of their labor to their own ends. The structure of modern capitalism, epitomized by the United States, functions to engage the vast majority of people in a system of wage-labor that provides for the sustenance of life only to the degree that it is necessary for continued existence and general complacency. By structuring education to further serve its own ends, capitalist society maintains a lower class who lack the education or the opportunity to gain the full benefits of their labor or to see themselves realized in the products or aims of their vocations.

By making the aims of labor serve only the interest of the elite few, this upper-class not only benefits directly from the fruits of said labor, but erodes the spirit of the worker such that other modes of existence seem fantastical, impractical, farcical, or even dangerous to social integrity. Perhaps the greatest social deception has been that by which the economic elite convinced the lower classes that their possession of the majority of capital and the means of production was not only just, deserved, and equitably earned through a fair economic system, but that the continuation of this system was a necessary foundation for stable society. Workers will fight for their own subjugation in the mistaken beliefs either that they are ultimately serving an equitable system or that the system as such is most desirable for over-all happiness and social stability, or as is most common some mixture of the two.

Dewey refutes much of this, although the society of today serves as an example that hardly needs explication to confirm the general sentiments of his arguments. He adamantly opposes the idea that the increased efficiency of modern labor is justification for its existence,

the idea that the production of the lower classes is so sufficient for everyone that the existence of a social elite is unproblematic. In a powerful statement he writes,

When social efficiency as measured by product or output is urged as an ideal in a would-be democratic society, it means that the depreciatory estimate of the masses characteristic of an aristocratic community is accepted and carried over. But if democracy has a moral and ideal meaning, it is that a social return be demanded from all and that opportunity for development of distinctive capacities be afforded all. (122)

The modern focus on the benefits of efficiency is thus a holdover from the ages of aristocracy, and continues a pattern that denigrates lower-class labor and human value. Their value was and is equated with the amount of their production, with quantity of product or time spent laboring increasingly outweighing the quality of the labor. Democratic living requires some degree of self-realization or actualization in the labor production of lower-class work, as well as shared opportunity for individual growth and development. Again, he will later write of this, “We lose rather than gain in change from serfdom to free citizenship if the most prized result of the change is simply an increase in the mechanical efficiency of the human tools of production” (256). The evocation of medieval imagery with the concept of serfdom is hardly accidental, and illustrates the continued existence of a wealthy, aristocratic elite.

The co-option of the aim and function of lower-class labor by the elite survives in large part by ensuring that laborers remain distracted or focused elsewhere. The common criticism of mass media is far less important than the nature of current wage labor, where many individuals earn barely enough to survive, if even that. The distraction is not primarily in media but in the exhaustion of mental and emotional capacity by the inundation of external, un-relatable labor. In the fashion of his times, Dewey writes, “The ordinary worker in the factory is of course under too immediate economic pressure to have a chance to produce a knowledge like that of the worker in the laboratory” (314-15). The knowledge that does exist even within jobs of material

fabrication are denied to the worker as unnecessary and inefficient, and the worker is rendered unable to garner knowledge by the induction of stress through economic pressure.

Exploitive Education: Formal Learning in a Class Society

The institutions of formal education are extremely prone to co-option by the economic elite, especially as the pedagogical employees of the institutions are subject to the same economic labor restraints of lower-class wage-laborers, and may unwittingly serve the interests of the elite without awareness. Although a capitalist society of class stratification has its own momentum, its own motion towards its continued existence, it also relies upon educational institutions to socialize lower class individuals into the most effective, cost effective, and least resistant laborers.

This education towards wage-labor does not always take the form of ‘positive’ information transmission. One can educate towards such a society, espousing support for the economic system or the functionality of political body. More damaging however, these institutions can also simply not transmit the information and attitudes that would lead to social opposition against class inequality. Beyond this, they actively sublimate this information underneath education deemed necessary, or supplant it with pro-aristocratic ideology. Such institutions educate towards the classed society, focusing on adapting an individual for survival within it. Both the positive pro-aristocratic education and the negative sublimation of information can happen consciously or unconsciously, in known support of the status quo or in the blind action of aimless wage labor. Dewey writes,

Any scheme for vocational education which takes its point of departure from the industrial regime that now exists, is likely to assume and to perpetuate its divisions and weaknesses, and thus to become an instrument in accomplishing the feudal dogma of social predestination. Those who are in a position to make their wishes good [the wealthy upper class], will demand a liberal, a cultural

occupation, and one which fits for directive power the youth in whom they are directly interested. To split the system, and give to others, less fortunately situated, an education conceived mainly as specific trade preparation, is to treat the schools as an agency for transferring the older division of labor and leisure, culture and service, mind and body, directed and directive class, into a society nominally democratic. (318)

It is clear in this instance that Dewey was speaking of his own time, as modern education is 'liberal' in the manner to which it is not devoted toward trades or the development of specific skill sets. In essence, however, it continues the transmission of the ancient dichotomy of upper and lower class. The information transferred from the old realm of labor has simply come to be a body of knowledge that serves no other purpose than to prove success within the institutions of formal education. The necessary diplomas and degrees by which candidates are judged reflects only their ability and willingness to function within such a system. That this does not say much about the quality of their labor has become increasingly recognized by large companies, and areas increasingly require unpaid internships or experience in addition to formal education.

This added preparation however, while it works towards a function more concrete than that of liberal formal education, still fails to impress upon the individual any sense of purpose of shared social aim, since its sole purpose is to further acclimate them to wage labor. In this way modern liberal education fails to promote democratic principles and instead reinforces capitalist division. The 'aimless' education of the student stymies movement towards growth, it encourages intellectual stagnation with its esoteric nature. These students are indoctrinated into the service of class division by the twin positive and negative structures of formal education, leaving them to become wage-laborers in a field or vocation completely removed from any of their education. Often this work requires no real education for its successful performance, leaving less and less opportunity for real engagement and the recognition of aims beyond the wages that provide sustenance.

Despite this vast potential for educational institutions to be used for the preservation of class division and oppression, it is through education that some of the first steps towards liberation and democratic living must happen. At first echoing his views on industrial labor, Dewey emphasizes the challenges education must face, and overcome, if it is to better embrace a democratic pedagogy, when he writes, “*The problem of social readjustment is openly industrial, having to do with the relations of capital and labor... No such vast readjustment could occur without offering a challenge to an education inherited from different social conditions, and without putting up to education new problems*” (313-14).

By responding to the demands of new changes and developments, education can be used for the promotion of democratic principles. And it is only once we have seriously begun to examine and restructure education that we can expect to see changes in social life, something Dewey points to when he claims, “We are in a position honestly to criticize the division of life into separate functions and of society into separate classes *only so far as we are free from responsibility* for perpetuating the educational practices which train the many for pursuits involving mere skill in production, and the few for a knowledge that is an ornament and a cultural embellishment” (256; my emphasis).

This requires a concentrated effort, based upon significant intellectual consideration and practical experimentation, a Pragmatic approach that Dewey consistently emphasizes. He stresses the necessity of this education to teach towards democratic principles. Of this he states,

It is not enough to see to it that education is not actively used as an instrument to make easier the exploitation of one class by another. School facilities must be secured of such amplitude and efficiency as will in fact and not simply in name discount the effects of economic inequalities, and secure to all the wards of the nation equality of equipment for their future careers. Accomplishment of this end demands not only adequate administrative provision of school facilities, and such supplementation of family resources as will enable youth to take advantage of them, but also such modification of traditional ideas of culture, traditional

subjects of study and traditional methods of teaching and discipline as will retain all the youth under educational influences until they are equipped to be masters of their own economic and social careers. (98)

Here Dewey intertwines the abilities of the educational system with the informal education of general socialization, and then relates both to the economic situation of a class-based capitalism. Schools must not only seek to educate in such a way as to foster democratic principles that would lead to economic equality, but must actively *compensate for the inequities* already existent. Institutional education should be a basin of equal opportunity and shared aspirations. One must imagine that Dewey would be opposed to the business-corporate attitudes that dominate much of higher education, where institutions become increasingly economically self-reliant. The disparities in quality of education as it relates to the financial wealth of the institution, whether it is public vs. private, subsidized vs. independent, rich or destitute, represent a fundamental means by which class society and aristocratic elitism are maintained and transmitted. It is a crystallized, physical representation of class ideology and aristocratic privilege. Where schools must level out class privilege with equal access and exposure to education and modes of life, the ingrained social ideologies that are transmitted during informal education must also be modified, so as to encourage equality in principle where schools encourage it in practice.

In his own time, Dewey did feel that many of these steps toward democratic living had been taken, and that these steps were reflected in education. Conceptions of history at the time were still much more likely to emphasize the scope and distance of modern development over the more unjust, dysfunctional, and outdated modes of life in the past (Dewey's frequent use of the term 'savage' points toward some of this thinking). The modern re-conceptualization of historical societies that focuses on the quality of culture and social life often stresses the great

development of past societies in these areas. Such effort was correctly spurred by a recognition of the incredible bias present in many depictions of history, generally recounted by ‘victors’ that included colonialism, racism, economic subjugation, sexism, and a bevy of other undesirable traits. However, when past societies are glorified simply because of their distance from modern capitalist society and the injustices it nourishes, the possibility of genuine reinterpretation, and the concrete benefits it provides, is increasingly curtailed.

While Dewey sees modernity as a definite progression forward and away from the past, he is completely unwilling to capitulate to the aristocratic claim that such advances are ‘enough’ or are ‘the best things can get’, both being methods by which class society preserves itself. Fundamental steps towards democratic living have been taken, and these steps have been reflected in education with the increasing belief that education belongs to all, that it is not a privilege of the upper class. Despite this, the aristocratic division between labor and leisure continues to inundate conceptions of formal education. In a powerful statement with a compelling, almost contemporary tone, he claims,

The increased political and economic emancipation of the ‘masses’ has shown itself in education; it has effected the development of a common school system of education, public and free. It has destroyed the idea that learning is properly a monopoly of the few who are predestined by nature to govern social affairs. *But the revolution is still incomplete.* The idea still prevails that a truly cultural or liberal education cannot have anything in common, directly at least, with industrial affairs, and that the education which is fit for the masses must be a useful or practical education in a sense which opposes useful and practical to nurture of appreciation and liberation of thought. (257; my emphasis)

That a man as deeply peaceful and sociable as Dewey sees this movement as revolutionary speaks to the immensity of the social structures and ideologies that must be reformed, and the forces to be overcome. In this vein however he always speaks of reformation, of forward movement out of what is current, in a way perhaps reminiscent of Hegelian synthesis

and its historical connotations. He does not speak of institutions to topple over, of societies to overthrow, of social classes to violently eliminate. The modern continuation of these problems might have encouraged him towards more stringent methods, but it seems more likely that the violence of the political revolutions and wars of the twentieth century would instead temper his language.

The Thin Veneer of Equality

In his time, Dewey was an immense public figure, and his influence extended well beyond the academic sphere. His work in educational theory was recognized by many, many of whom no doubt disagreed with him in some manner. Ultimately, the American school system would see numerous changes and reformations, many of which would be influenced by Deweyan theory. However, despite the appearance of a genuine adoption of his theories by many institutions, his work was often misunderstood. Although Dewey would likely agree that practically his theory could only be adopted in partial form at first, and that the initial modifications towards democratic living should happen in formal education, these institutions were unable to truly implement the essence of his pedagogical theory.

Even as the general structure and sentiment of public society continued to serve the economic elite and class stratification, formal institutions failed to embody his teachings at a fundamental level beyond economic issues. His hostility towards dualisms went largely unrecognized in places where his pedagogy could be enacted, and hence the methods influenced by his thinking only resemble his ideology in appearance, and not in meaning or function. Schools began to increasingly recognize, accept, and even exalt the importance of play in development, but they did so while continuing to understand it as an opposition to work or study. Instead of a continuity of education from play to work, schools saw play as essentially allowing

for more efficient absorption of formal education. Play made children become better, more sociable workers; the focus was never on the manner in which it encouraged personal growth and flourishing.

Implicitly and explicitly, schools continued to support the capitalist status quo of class oppression, maintaining the idea that education was preparation for future labor. As long as education remains focused on preparation for future *labor* and not for future *living*, it is unable to transmit or promote “the essentials needed for [the] realization of democratic ideals” (192). The mechanical approach to the formation of *ability* within the student continues to echo class structure. Where institutions continue this practice, Dewey writes that it is because they unconsciously assume that democratic ideals are unrealizable. They assume that “...in the future, as in the past, getting a livelihood, ‘making a living’, must signify for most men and women doing things which are not significant, freely chosen and ennobling to those who do them” (192). Instead, it is assumed that future labor will be defined by “... doing things which serve ends unrecognizable by those engaged in them, carried on under the direction of others for the sake of pecuniary reward” (192). This is a foundational notion for the continuation of class-based, capitalist society.

Neither, however, should schools adopt an education so ‘liberal’ that it is removed from daily life. The transmission of a particular set of information deemed necessary for ‘proper education’ is far removed from either the fostering of democratic sentiments or the transmission of information useful and relative to modern life. This problem of curriculum is especially pertinent today, where much of what is taught in schools is difficult or impossible to relate to life. He writes, “A curriculum which acknowledges the social responsibilities of education must

present situations where problems are relevant to the problems of living together, and where observation and information are calculated to develop social insight and interest” (192).

The critique of education as the transmission of an identical set of information to all students regardless of their social situation could not be more pointed, and remains equally valid and poignant today. Transmitting the information and past experiences of increasingly complex social groups requires “special selection, formulation, and organization in order that they may be adequately transmitted to the new generation”, “But” he continues, “this very process tends to set up subject matter as something of value by itself, apart from its function in promoting the realization of the meaning implied in the present experience of the immature. Especially is the educator exposed to the temptation to conceive his task in terms of the pupil’s ability to appropriate and reproduce the subject matter in set statements, irrespective of its organization into his activities as a developing social member” (192-93).

This issue continues unabated today, and is exacerbated by the use of standardized testing, which *forces* educators to transmit only, for lack of time, the information required to succeed in the testing. In this way, formal education does simply prepare students for a life of lower-class labor by instilling in them notions of externally determined aims. Within schools, students learn so that they may pass tests, tests designed and given by authority figures. It is these and other authority figures which the student tries to please by succeeding in exams. Formal education then mimics an element of informal education, where socialization is accomplished by forcing the young to adopt the aims of others in order to please them, without the individual understanding or internalizing the meaning and purpose of these aims.

There is a two-part failure then, both on the part of educational institutions and of society at large. By misunderstanding fundamental Deweyan principles, the education of formal

institutions never reaches a level where it is able to form individuals that would go on to reform society in a more democratic direction. Schools succeed only in perpetuating the class divide by educating towards labor, with an added mythos of individual success that permeates American and now global capitalism. Schools educate so that ‘deserving’ and ‘hard-working’ individuals will be able to rise up out of their social class and climb into one higher. By doing so, schools imply that this mode of life is good and desirable, curtailing the inquisitive or critical mind that would investigate the situation and find it ethically untenable.

Society too bears some blame for this failure, as a successful restructuring of formal education does require consistent and critical input from older, experienced individuals. Instead, it seems that today, despite all the accomplishments and developments humanity has made, the many strides toward equality and justice, that a pervasive sense of resignation has cemented itself into social consciousness, and it is considered more farcical than at any time in the past to hope for a society that is just or equitable. The failure of communism has become an easy and common critique of liberal socialization, but this failure bears little or no resemblance to Deweyan theory, which remains firmly rooted in democratic politics and economic systems that far more closely resemble regulated capitalism.

Conclusion

In considering the entirety of *Democracy and Education*, it becomes clear that economic inequality and class stratification are the greatest factors holding back the development of a more democratic way of living. For Dewey, democracy refers not only to a political system of suffrage-based elections, but a way of life that encourages an increasingly equitable society, with shared means and social aims. To come into existence, and to remain in place, democracy requires the cultivation of two main principles: a varied intercourse stimulating a continuous

readjustment of social habit in response to new situations, demands, and needs, and a recognition and acceptance of the way in which shared mutual interests provide social stability and allow for development. Both of these are disrupted by class distinction, as well as by the ideologies that underlie such social inequity.

Communication is the fundamental means by which individuals, social groups, and nations are introduced to new ideas, experiences, and modes of being. Without communication, it is impossible to become aware of changes that demand new physical, mental, and emotional orientations. These new demands are the most significant motivating factor for encouraging society to develop in a more equitable way, as they often call for greater social equality. When class stratification becomes an accepted norm of a society, the interaction between classes diminishes, and groups are exposed less and less to the views and perspectives of the other. Beyond the intentional subjugation or oppression of lower classes by an aristocratic elite, this distance obscures potential social development, encouraging social stagnation because of an apparent intellectual infertility. Opening communication allows for more shared social experiences, which in turn tends to encourage forward development out of emotional resonance and sympathy.

Mutual social interests are disrupted in much the same way. When shared, a multiplicity of overlapping social aims encourages cooperation among individuals and groups, and this cooperation is a key element in encouraging communication. Working together encourages the emotional sentiments that underpin the two key democratic principles. When brought to either of its extremes however, social aims can become a force for the destabilization and preclusion of democracy. Without some sense of shared social aims individuals are encouraged to focus only on their own well-being. Although it may at first seem that a class-based society would

encourage mutual interests among members of the same group, the degree of oppression inherent in such a system almost always undermines communal interest, primarily by forcing individuals into a state of economic distress such that they are unable to hold significant concerns for others beyond themselves or those within their immediate circle of concern.

On the other extreme, a society totally united behind one or a few social aims has moved towards totalitarianism. This unity is often forced, generally upon those 'below' the group or groups in power, and in its homogeneity inhibits the differences that encourage democratic sentiments and which point in the direction of social development. True development happens when the needs and demands of others are incorporated into the larger social fabric. By homogenizing everyone under a single aim the possibilities of development are eroded down to a single direction, a single path, which functions by the forceful oppression of the many into following this direction, and the elimination or abandonment of those who cannot adapt or follow suit.

These principles and the sentiments that underlie them are the foundations of a stable, malleable democratic society, and can be encouraged by various social means. The most practical and best of these is through the systems of formal education. Education grows from the unconscious socializing forces of informal education in the tribe or town, to a more directed, purposeful education as the demands go beyond survival and basic amenities. The beginnings of formal education predate schools, encompassing anyone who passed on increasingly complex sets of information. This increase in complexity and quantity of information in a developing society eventually demands the formation of institutions for the express purpose of formal education.

Once these formal institutions have begun to be established, the power of influence they wield becomes increasingly visible, and it follows that they typically come to encourage certain social orientations. Schools, through the positive presentation of experience and data or the negative sublimation of information, foster emotional sentiments and basic outlooks that can work for or against social equality. Their ability to do so however is limited and directed by the form and manner of local society. The promotion of democratic principles requires some degree of social cooperation, in the very least the general orientation towards a desire for a more democratically equitable society.

Within a society of class difference, the upper classes have a vested interest in the preservation of the status quo for their own continued benefit. In this vein, they have reason to both crush public desire for equality, a tactic then reflected and internalized in the institutions of formal education. Class distinction becomes not only a source of different environmental and economic experiences, but of educational difference as well. The lower class, already restricted by circumstances in the possible field of experience within life, are further constrained by the limited nature and quality of their education, especially when compared with the possible experiences available to the upper class. Additionally, schools come to echo the ideology of the ruling class, especially when they justify class difference.

The immensity of this issue, the need to overcome class difference in order to develop a truly equitable, democratic society, cannot prevent the theorizing, experimentation, and early implantation that are necessary pre-cursors. Indeed, it is this investigation into encouraging democratic principles in formal education that reveals the pervasiveness of class difference, and the damage it does to democratic life. This theory must be broadcast and publicly encouraged as much as is possible, especially within education where possible. However, the true development

of a democratic society is impossible as long as class difference remains a key element of social structure. Its very essence is antithetical to social equity. One of the upper class's most pernicious acts was in the dissemination into public conscious of the belief of the necessity of an upper class for social stability, and a justification of their existence via a system of merit.

In the face of all this however, one must imagine that Dewey would only insist on an ever greater need to express democratic principles and sentiments, to work with our fellow humans towards not just a better future but a better way of living in the present. We must open the channels of communication that are strangled by our social separations; we must share the same hope for the future of humanity. Dewey would not have believed that the path to democracy was through the barrel of the gun. We must work to create the most equitable, fair, just, open, compassionate, empathetic, curious, and intelligent society that we can. This begins both in the nature of our social contact and the content of the institutions of formal education. Children must be educated not for the world that is past, but for the world to come. And we must work to ensure that this world is the best we could offer.