

John Dewey, Jane Addams and the pragmatist road to democracy

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Abstract

This paper is part of a collective project on "Democratic Education" and its focus is the identification of John Dewey's and Jane Addams's visions as the main references of a pragmatist understanding of democracy which has deep educational implications.

Both Addams and Dewey have, indeed, an ethical and practical understanding of democracy as it is intended as a form of associated living and mutual engagement, and this offers us the possibility to highlight its educational potential and to use it as a pedagogical guide to develop practices of democratic education, going beyond the idea of democracy as a mere procedural and political form of civic life and government, as inspired by a neo-liberal frame of reference.

1. Democracy as a moral challenge

Dewey's first understanding of democracy is expressed in *«The Ethics of Democracy»* published in 1888 where the philosopher states that democracy can be considered as the "spiritual organ" which expresses the "common will" of individuals and society, which are "organic to each other" (EW 1:238).

As noted by Phillips, Dewey derived from Hegel an organicistic worldview and on this basis applied organicism to the biological organism, to society, and to psychology (Phillips, 1971).

Shook points out that Dewey's organicism can be better classified as "Organic Realism" since the philosopher overcomes the realism-idealism dichotomy through the elaboration of a "complete philosophical organon about science, culture, and ethics" which grounds the idea that "morality is universalizable and that "human individuality is developed through participation in social intelligence's realization of ideals"(Shook, 2017).

Within this philosophical framework-that Dewey developed in connection to his early research on ethics and on the practical dimensions of individual and collective life-we can identify the grounds of his idea of democracy, which makes sense in ethical and political terms.

London states that it is on the basis of an ethics of self-realization that Dewey develops his idea of democracy "as "organic," to the individual and "as synergistic and evolving" since its main task is "to secure the conditions for the self-realization of all the individuals in a society." (London, 2023).

Accordingly, on the basis of an organicistic and ethical vision of the relationship between individuals and society Dewey affirms that "*democracy approaches most nearly the ideal of all social organization; that in which the individual and society are organic to each other*" (EW 1:238).

As we can see, from the Deweyan perspective there is a strong integration of ethics and politics and, therefore, "*democracy, in a word, is a social, that is to say, an ethical conception, and upon its ethical significance is based its significance as governmental. Democracy is a form of government only because it is a form of moral and spiritual association*" (EW 1:240).

In these terms the roots of democracy can be found in the conditions that favor and sustain the moral and spiritual association of individuals who come together since they share common commitments, interests and values; at the same time, each individual is ethically committed to a project of self-realization, which should be facilitated and supported by the society.

On this basis each individual has a personal responsibility to support the construction and maintenance of a democratic society since it is this form of associated living that offers to each one the possibility to grow, flourish and contribute to the advancement of the society itself.

In these terms, while the idea of democratic citizenship is somehow impersonal and does not commit each single individual to the cultivation and maintenance of a democratic social structure, according to Dewey “*personal responsibility, individual initiation, these are the notes of democracy*” (EW 1: 244) and these notes are the core of any educational enterprise.

These ideas were developed by Dewey during his engagement at the University of Michigan, a few years before arriving in Chicago (1894) and encountering Jane Addams, who in 1889 had established there Hull House, an innovative experience of settlement aimed at supporting the empowerment and social growth of disadvantaged children and adults.

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In «*Twenty Years at Hull-House: With Autobiographical Notes*» (1910) Addams described the experience of Hull House as the progressive outcome of a sound process of inquiry, which incorporated desires, hopes and visions, all contributing to the creation of a social and political experiment aimed at proving that, in certain specific conditions, some forms of associated living can be realized and can contribute to promote social and political change, which leads to the construction of a democratic society.

According to Stengel, the Hull House experience was particularly inspirational for Dewey on his arrival in Chicago since he was “searching for a way to instantiate his thinking about democracy, about Christianity and about experimentalism” (Stengel, in Cunningham et al. 2008, 29). As a matter of fact, these three elements, combined together, were the core of the Hull House experiment, conceived as a form of settlement inspired by Christian values and organized according to a democratic model.

As Moore writes providing us with a picturesque description of a day at Hull House “Hull House stands not so much for a solution of problems as a place of exchange” and indeed “the exchange is the vital thing” as it creates the conditions of a “direct human touch of richer with poorer, wise with simple, learned with untaught, dynamic with static which has for its aim the realization by all the children of their kinship with the great family” (Moore, 1897).

In these terms, we can say that Hull House was in some way the living embodiment of the idea of democracy that Addams had in mind and later developed in «*Democracy and Social Ethics*» (1902) where she points out that the term “democratic” should not be referred either to a “sentiment” or a “creed” but, rather, to a “rule for living” and a “test of faith” (Addams 1902, Location No 11676).

According to Addams, democracy can be understood as a multidimensional cultural, political and social asset which is at the same time: a) a normative and practical reference for individual and collective life; b) the empirical condition of associated living within which we can test our ideas, opinions and values; c) the context where we can “determine” our ideals which constantly need to be reflected upon through a “sane” process of judgment; and d) the ideal that sustains the democratic reconstruction and transformation of social structures in ethical terms (Addams 1902).

Hull House (where Dewey was engaged as “trustee” and where he actually experienced “modes of bringing people together, of doing away with barriers...that keep people from real communion with each other” as he wrote in his 1908 *Ethics*), was also the inspiration for his vision of democracy as an associated form of life rather than a form of government later described in «*Democracy and Education*» (1916).

This vision is indeed, the philosophical and educational translation of the Hull House experience, based on the acknowledgement of the driving force of democracy as a moral “ideal”.

As Eldridge points out, in Dewey’s terms democracy can be thought of as a revisable ideal which is not a fantasy but rather an “action-guiding possibility” that is grounded in the historical individual and collective experience (Eldridge, 1996). It is therefore part of an ongoing search for better forms of associated living based on the consolidation and dissemination of peculiar forms of social experiences; these offer individuals and communities the opportunity to gain a deep and broad

understanding of the life of society as a whole and shape the way individuals experience the world and act within it in social terms in pursuit of a shared objective.

From this perspective, both for Addams and Dewey democracy can be understood as a moral challenge for every single individual and for society as a whole, which works both as an ethical reference as well as a political goal.

2. Democracy between ethics and science

In «*Some stages of logical thought*» (1900) John Dewey explains how ethics and science can be understood as the complementary tools of a project of social reconstruction from a democratic perspective. This reality is based on a vision of the natural and social world as a complex texture of facts, which can be explored and understood through logical processes that identify the causes, consequences but also the analogies and resemblances that lead us to identify possible frames of reference which work as regulative tools for our understanding and our agency.

As Dewey states *“The observable world is a democracy. The difference which makes a fact what it is, is not an exclusive distinction, but a matter of position and quantity, an affair of locality and aggregation, traits which place all facts upon the same level, since all other observable facts also possess them, and are, indeed, conjointly responsible for them. Laws are not edicts of a sovereign binding a world of subjects otherwise lawless; they are the agreements, the compacts of facts themselves, or, in the familiar language of Mill, the common attributes, the resemblances”*. This is why there is an *“emphasis of modern science upon control flows from the same source. Interest is in the new, in extension, in discovery. Inference is the advance into the unknown, the use of the established to win new worlds from the void”* (MW1 : 171).

Dewey understands science not according to a positivistic but to a pragmatist paradigm, within which, as Rorty points out, science “will no longer seem to tower over morality” (Rorty, 2007: 920) but will be rather a counterpart of moral imagination in order to support social progress.

On the basis of this paradigm it is possible to reconstruct the relationship between individuals, communities, ethics and science, focusing on the capacity of each individual and each community to be engaged in the processes of ethical and scientific inquiry, to understand the nature of these processes and their outcomes, and to make use of their products.

As Hickman points out, Dewey believed that both the outcomes of scientific progress and the method of scientific inquiry could work as cognitive technologies and tools to model individual and collective attitudes and approaches to political and social issues. However, he did not believe that scientific progress would lead to social growth if not sustained by moral objectives which had to be kept in mind (Hickman, 1990).

As a matter of fact, Dewey was fully aware of the ethical implications of scientific inquiry and of the consideration that all scientific inquiry had a meaning and a value only within the context of its relationship with human and social growth. Accordingly, ethics and science can be understood as the complementary tools of a project of social reconstruction from a democratic perspective.

As Metz points out “according to Dewey, the scientific method ‘*can be interpreted only as the means*’ by which “*he hoped to concretize his philosophy of experience within the democratic order*” (Metz, 1969:262). Science is therefore understood as an essential element to promote and sustain a democratic social organization. However, as Allan highlights, at the same time a democratic social organization is also the pre-condition for the development of science since Dewey's claim, indeed “*is not simply that democracy will benefit as do the sciences from a proper method of inquiry - as though democracy and the scientific method are two separate habits of intelligent action. The method used by science requires democracy, and vice versa. The skills of intelligent problem solving are dependent on dispositions that democracies nurture and tyrannies inhibit. Conversely, without a scientifically educated citizenry, democracy is crippled. Science and democracy are each a necessary condition for the other.*” (Allan, 1996:448, 449).

In Dewey's vision ethics and science cannot be understood as separate dimensions of individual and social experience. Moreover, as he explained in the essay *Outlines of a Critical Theory of Ethics* (1892) ethics should be considered as a "*philosophic science*" "which *treats action as action, analyzing it into its factors and relationships*" so that "*internal and external are both alike to it--simply constituting elements*" [EW, 3, 242]. As we can see in his "*Ethics*" (1903) he therefore believed that also ethical issues had to be addressed using a scientific approach and scientific methodologies. Indeed, he called for the diffused mastery of methods, tools, and forms of knowledge, which would help individuals and societies to develop a wider awareness and understanding of the problems arising from human experience and social practices and institutions.

Society (understood by Dewey as a living organism) is therefore engaged in a constant process of self-renewal which is achieved through moral commitment, deriving from the joint effort of scientific research and the reconstruction of social ties, institutions and structures. From the Deweyan perspective, human development brings about social development, and social development, if realized in equitable and sustainable terms, accompanies individual development.

A more balanced social order can therefore be achieved through a collective and intersubjective commitment in the advancement of a shared project of growth for all and for each individual. Such a project requires both a scientific analysis of the causes and conditions that prevent the full realization of social justice, and the reconstruction of intersubjective relationships through a profound revision of attitudes, behaviors and values.

Dewey is aware of the political and social implication of his ethics, which is not understood as "*an art whose business is to lay down rules*" but rather as a "*theory of practice or conduct*" whose task is "*providing methods for analyzing and resolving concrete individual and social situations, rather than of furnishing injunctions and precepts*". In these terms it does not depend on values, ideals and fixed and immutable standards but is configured increasingly as a "*working method for the self-regulation of the individual and of society*" (MW3: 57).

Anderson explains how Dewey provides a reconstruction of the moral theory "*by replacing fixed moral rules and ends with an experimental method that treats norms for valuing as hypotheses to be tested in practice, in light of their widest consequences for everyone*" (Anderson, 2014: on line). On this basis Fesmire highlights the practical and political implications of Dewey's ethics, taking into account the fact that "*our aspirations are not isolated from those of others*" and that therefore we need "*a democratized imagination that aesthetically perceives and artistically responds to the entire system of exigencies in a troubled situation*" so that we can "*skillfully elicit differences and give them a hearing*" in order to "*reconstruct and harmonize conflicting values so that we can mutually grow*" (Fesmire, 1999: 534).

According to Dewey the use of a "*reflective intelligence*" allows us to explore in depth the moral dimension of human experience, identifying "*the ideal which it pretends to embody*"; on this basis we can review the customs, moral norms and existing values by activating a process of ethical inquiry which highlights "*the inconsistencies, the incoherencies, the compromises, the failures, between the actual practice and the theory at the basis of this practice*". As a consequence, the new ideals and new values proposed will not be the product of isolated opinions but the result of a shared process of inquiry which is "*the outcome of the ideal embodied in existing customs, ideas and institutions*" (EW 3: 359).

The full expression of ethics is achieved in the socialization of intelligence and thought, constantly cultivated through reflective processes which are expressed in forms of judgment and situated reasoning contributing to the critical review of the ideas and values at stake since, as Dewey states in the first edition of his *Ethics* "*reflection on values is the method of their modification*" (MW.5.174).

This idea is confirmed in the second edition of *Ethics* where Dewey highlights the cultural and social implications of exercising reflection in a moral sense where "*critical questioning of existing institutions and critical discussion of changes, proposed on the theory that they will produce social betterment, are the best means of enforcing the fact that moral theory is more than a remote*

exercise in conceptual analysis or than a mere mode of preaching and exhortation. When we take the social point of view we are compelled to realize the extent to which our moral beliefs are a product of the social environment and also the extent to which thinking, new ideas, can change this environment” (LW, 7.316).

3. Democracy and the ethical development of society

According to Addams democratic life requires an ethical transformation of social structures. Here the term "democratic" does not indicate a "feeling" or even a "creed" but rather indicates a "rule of life" and a "test of faith" (Addams, 1902).

Within this framework democracy can be understood both as a normative and practical reference for individual and collective life and as the empirical condition of associated life. It defines a context where it is possible to test and validate ideas, opinions and values but also "determine" ideals, including the democratic ideal, through the use of a "sound" judgment of practice. On the basis of this normative and practical reference (according to a Kantian approach) the morality of individual and social actions has to be judged in terms of the will behind them rather than in terms of their effective outcomes.

Moreover, Addams distinguished between “individual” and “social” morality and explained that individual ethical motives and values need to be constantly contrasted with the ethical motives and values embedded within social contexts and with the outcomes of the actions inspired by those motives and values.

According to Addams, as she notes in *Democracy and Social Ethics*, there is a deep relationship between morality and agency: “*we continually forget that the sphere of morals is the sphere of action, that speculation in regard to morality is but observation and must remain in the sphere of ineffectual comment, that a situation does not really become moral until we are confronted with the question of what shall be done in a concrete case, and are obliged to act upon our theory*”(Addams,1902, ps. 1903, 1906). Moreover, actions are “*the sole medium of expression for ethics*” (Addams, 1902, pos 13600).

In Addams’ view even the highest ethical ideals need to be operationalized concretely in everyday experiences and situations and their operationalization occurs through actions which are, as she writes in *Twenty Years at Hull House*, “the only medium man has for receiving and appropriating truth” (Addams, 1910 (ps 2547). Every human action contains either an epistemological motive (the search for truth) or an ethical and practical one (the operationalization of ideals and values) and combines both of them completely. It is for this reason that we cannot analyze and explore individual and collective actions unless we take into account the forms of knowledge that we are able to construct and re-construct while we act (together with the lessons learned from our actions), as well as the motives, scopes and values that direct them, together with the implications and further consequences and outcomes of those actions.

At the same time, behaviors and actions must be assessed with reference to ethical coordinates that are not abstract ideas but rather concrete realities within which individuals confront each other, make plans and define shared goals. According to Addams, the main ethical reference for individuals and groups is democracy, understood, as Mostajir notes, as “an embodied ethic with which to assess our own behaviors and relationships” (Mostajir, 2020).

This means that we should always refer to democracy when it comes to judging a particular action, behavior or project as well as when we, as individuals, are engaged in different kinds of relationship. Such relationships should be sustained by what Addams called a “sympathetic knowledge” of the positions, points of view and statements of other individuals in order to obtain a democratic value (Addams, 1902).

4. Industrial capitalism and industrial democracy

In a subsequent work, “*Newer Ideals of Peace*” (Addams, 1907), Jane Addams analyzed the economic and social conditions of a peaceful democratic society and identified in “uncontrolled industrial capitalism” the primary cause of domestic and international violence (Addams 1907, 27–28) and a major threat to the maintenance of a “social” democracy, which, according to Fisher, is “the ethics suitable to an urban, industrial society” (Fisher, 2001).

Unlike [Dewey] Addams cannot cope with the idea that it is possible to cultivate and foster an “industrial democracy”. She is very critical of the idea that democracy can be combined with industrialization on a practical and ethical basis. While industrial capitalism is based on an “individual ethics”, democracy is based on a “social ethic” which requires the acknowledgment of the capacity of each and every one to contribute to the growth and the advancement of society and to be ethically committed to a project of social development.

On the contrary, individual ethics is based on the capacity of a single individual to plan and promote advancement and growth according to a defined vision of where advancement and growth ought to lead.

Addams criticized industrial capitalism not on the basis of economic and socio-political theories, but rather on the basis of her direct observation of its impact on individual lives as well as on urbanistic structures and infrastructures. “As a pragmatist she focuses on how industrial capitalism actually functions, rather than on its theoretical lineage.” Accordingly, she “examines the meaning and impact of industrial capitalism on concrete lives and finds its patriarchal character by analogy with the concrete experience of living in patriarchal families” (Fischer, 2001: 290) based on a pattern of authority and responsibility. Due to its structure and the conditions of industrial capitalism, an industrial society cannot be considered as fully democratic.

In these terms, Addams’ position is different from Dewey’s, which is based on an optimistic understanding of economic and social growth.

In “*The Need of an Industrial Education in an Industrial Democracy*” (1916) Dewey tried to imagine the possibility of developing a project of “industrial democracy” based on the identification of the most significant productive processes and the engagement of individuals in vocational pathways as well as on a common and general educational process, aimed at overcoming class division and at sustaining the development of individual capacities (MW10:141).

Later, in “*Liberalism and Social Action*” (1935) (dedicated to the memory of Jane Addams), Dewey described the advancement of “industrial democracy” in terms of a process of “liberation from material insecurity and from the coercions and repressions that prevent multitudes from participation in the vast cultural resources that are at hand”. He stated that this process required an integration of “old” and “new” models of economic development and social organization as well as beliefs, ideas and values. This integration has to be carried on by “liberalism,” to which Dewey assigned a “mediating function,” as it places a strong emphasis “upon the role of freed intelligence as the method of directing social action” (LW 11:37).

Dewey has a particular understanding of liberalism and is aware that the individualistic implications of classic liberalism cannot be part of a democratic project. As Wilkinson notes “*Dewey is alert to the ideological power exerted by liberal individualism and market holism, which replace shared values and experience with a single economic logic and instrumental rationality. He presents a sustained critique of the modern regime’s individualist worldview, its tendency to create and sustain huge socio-economic inequalities that threaten the ‘public’, and its celebration of competition without social co-operation and technology without human understanding. And although rejecting, on the other hand, the alternative Marxist notion of class struggle as an historical explanation of change and as an appropriate means of reform, Dewey insists that the ethics and method of democracy must pervade all social, industrial and economic relations*” (Wilkinson, 2012).

On this basis Thayer Bacon points out that Dewey’s idea of democracy “starts by letting go of the assumptions of individualism, rationalism, and universalism, which form the foundation for

classical liberal democracy” in order to develop “a relational democratic theory” which is “based on a view of relations as transactional, where individuals are influenced and affected by others but at the same time influence others; it is a relationship that works both ways, and all are changed as a result” (Thayer Bacon, 2006: 27).

This transactional view of democracy is based on the idea that we cannot see individuals as separate entities and, moreover, we cannot see individual and societies as disconnected. Rather, we have to focus on the negotiations and transactions that create the conditions of confrontation, dialogue and shared inquiry on the common issues which are the key elements of a democratic society.

4. Democracy and Education

In 1916 Dewey wrote «*Democracy and Education*» where he deepened his understanding of the limits of industrial capitalism, which needs to be reframed according to a democratic ideal. He showed that «industrial democracy» can be a sustainable cultural, political and social project only if it is developed on the basis of a sound educational process.

Dewey interprets democracy not as a form of government, but as an associated form of life, which endeavors to develop, through education, certain habits of action, relationship and thought.

The Deweyan idea of democracy embeds therefore: ethical and "practical" elements (which have to do with individual and collective action); emotional and relational elements (which have to do with ways of being together, of building and cultivating relationships); and epistemic and cognitive elements (which have to do with the types of judgment, reasoning and thought that support the maintenance and development of a democratic society based on reflective processes).

To obtain a better understanding of the message of *Democracy and Education* it is useful to analyze the book in connection with the Dewey-Lippmann debate following the publication of Lippmann's *Public Opinion* in 1922, where the author claimed that deliberative democracy was an unworkable dogma or impossible dream.

In order to contrast this claim Dewey, first in a review published in *The New Republic* (1922) and later in his book *The Public and its Problems* (1927), affirmed the possibility of forging a democratic public by nurturing democratic institutions in which people would gradually educate themselves into processes of deliberation and decision-making. Thereby, he highlighted the essential role of education and schooling in the development of a sound and reflective public opinion.

According to Dewey the formation of public opinion is the consequence of a shared “communication of the results of social inquiry.” This “marks one of the first ideas framed in the growth of political democracy as it will be one of the last to be fulfilled.” (LW 2: 346). On this basis, Dewey's view of democracy is deeply connected with his view of inquiry, intended as the background to a deliberative form of dialogue and confrontation that is at the core of democratic life. In *The Public and its Problems* Dewey shows how inquiry is the condition for the construction, maintenance and development of a state according to a “pluralistic conception.” However, it is necessary that “the tools of social inquiry”, such as “concepts, general principles, theories and dialectical developments”, should be forged in places and under conditions close to contemporary events.

This means that inquiry comes out of social contexts and contributes to reconstructing and to reorganizing them as a growing number of individuals and groups begin to explore the possibility of overcoming and making sense of the conditions which they live in. For this reason “the improvement of the methods and conditions of debate, discussion and persuasion”, which “depends essentially upon frequent and perfecting the processes of inquiry and of dissemination of their conclusions” (LW 2:366), is the ground for the development of a democratic society.

Each and every person is entitled, legitimated, and morally obliged to participate in the processes of inquiry and deliberation that sustain social growth. For this reason the “Democratic Ideal” that Dewey sketches out in *Democracy and Education* involves two interconnected elements: “greater reliance upon the recognition of mutual interests as a factor in social control”; and a deep

“change in social habits, a continuous readjustment through meeting the new situations produced by varied intercourse” (MW 9:92).

These are the deliberative and reflective requirements of a democratic social life and the key elements for the construction of a participatory citizenship.

5. Democracy, equality and individuality

In “*Philosophy and democracy*” (1919) John Dewey states that “whatever the idea of equality means for democracy [...] it does not exist to illustrate a principle, to realize a universal ideal or to represent a class” (MW11: 53); it is rather a social, ethical and practical reference.

In social and moral terms, equality does not mean a mathematical equivalence but rather “the inapplicability of considerations in terms of greater and lesser, superior and inferior” to individuals and social relations. Accordingly, “the quantitative differences of ability, strength, position, wealth” are “irrelevant compared to the fact that individuality is the manifestation of something irreplaceable” (ibidem). Within this framework each and every individual existence “is taken into consideration for itself and not as something that can be equivalent or transformable into something else”. The political and social consequence of this approach is “a metaphysical mathematics of the immeasurable” in which each individual speaks for her/himself and demands consideration for her/himself, to the extent that “democracy is not made up of original people, geniuses, heroes, or divinities but of individuals, associates who interacting with each other make everyone's life richer in meaning” (ibidem).

According to Kallen “Dewey would abandon the word individual “and all substitutes for it.” Instead, “he would use “behavior” to denote the transactional unity of whatever differences individual and social might signify” (Kallen, 1959). Individuals as separate and self-consistent entities do not exist in Dewey’s terms, but they are a function of their being associated with other individuals; of their belonging to a community; of their being engaged in interactions or transactions with the natural and social world they live in; and of their being committed to the exploration and solution of shared problems.

In *Individualism Old and New* Dewey stated that “individuality is at first spontaneous and unshaped; it is a potentiality, a capacity of development [...] it is a unique manner of acting in and with a world of objects and persons. It is not something complete in itself [...]. Since individuality is a distinctive way of feeling the impact of the world and of showing a preferential bias in response to these impacts, it develops into shape and form only through interaction with actual conditions” (LW 5, 121).

According to this framework, as Di Mascio states, “individuality did not assert itself through some inner essence – its conatus was not essentialist – but in the preservation of the individual’s link to the other and to the organic whole” (Di Mascio, 2012: 7).

Dewey was profoundly dissatisfied with a “rugged” form of individualism considered the social counterpart of an uncontrolled capitalism that led to the 1929 economic crash and a profound crisis of the democratic model, contemporaneous with the rise of totalitarian regimes, such as Fascism and, after 1927, the Communist system in Soviet Russia. He believed that these two forms of associated life were based on the false dichotomy individual versus society. In his view, instead, it is necessary to have a “re-evaluation of the two components of the dualism” (Di Mascio, ibidem). Therefore, “individuality was social –corporate and organic -through and through” (ibidem). From this perspective, according to Dewey “the balance between the individual and the social will be organic” (LW 5, 65) and a democratic society should be based on actions and practices which maintain and preserve this balance.

The most important and valuable of these practices is education. And it is for this reason that in “*Education and Social Direction*”(1918) Dewey points out that “the unsolved problem of democracy is the construction of an education which will develop that kind of individuality which is

intelligently alive to the common life and sensitively loyal to its common maintenance” and calls for “that type of education which will discover and form the kind of individual who is the intelligent carrier of a social democracy” (MW 11:58).

In *Liberalism and Social Action* Dewey explains that the source of the failure of democracy is the parcelization of actions and the lack of social forms of organization that support a collective engagement of shared projects. For this reason it is necessary “to bring about that type of social organization that will encourage the socialized extension of intelligence” (LW 11: 37). From this perspective, as Putnam points out, “democracy is not just one form of social life among other workable forms of social life. Rather, it is the precondition for the full application of intelligence to the solution of social problems” (Putnam, 1991, p. 217), intending intelligence not as an individual performance but as a collective one.

7. Democracy as an «imaginative» and creative process

In “*The Philosophy of a New Day*”: Addams highlights how the most damaging epistemic condition for a society is to “holding fast to certain social concepts which are no longer useful, and which are not yet superseded by the new” (Addams, 1933: 350) while only true condition of economic and social development is that in which everyone is allowed to imagine new possibilities starting from a concrete and realistic awareness of current conditions.

Addams attributed “much of the insensibility and hardness of the world to the lack of imagination which prevents a realization of the experiences of other people” (Addams, 1902, pos 133). Therefore, as noted by Griffith, she “made a direct connection between imagination and building world community”, trying to identify the best conditions for the “cultivation of this powerful, humanizing force” (Griffith, 2014). Addams was aware that imagination is a necessary epistemic position in order to sustain mutual understanding and commitment to a shared goal but she was also mindful of the fact that imagination is not sufficient in order to realize the political and social conditions that warrant the possibility of creating a democratic form of living.

According to this vision, as Addams states in *The Philosophy of a New Day*, democratic thinking requires a combination of two different epistemic positions: an imaginative and utopian position and a realistic position. This combination is the result of an articulated and dynamic cognitive movement that requires “vigorous thinking” capable of building a “bridge” between those things which we desire and those things which are possible” (Addams, 1933: 351). between old and new ideas, between opportunities and unlikely possibilities realized and achievable.

Democracy is therefore the outcome of a complex and balanced process of exploration of the conditions that allow the realization of new forms of associated life and new rules of living, which need to be constantly revised through shared self-correcting actions and practices.

Moreover, democracy is the outcome of a dialogic process based on the active engagement of individuals in the exploration of common issues and problems and in the construction of a public sphere of confrontation and debate within which it is possible to create and re-create the conditions and the shared rules of associated living.

From this perspective, as Dewey states in «*Creative Democracy, the Task Before Us*», democracy should be thought of as a «creative», self-corrective and ongoing process that is based both on “faith in human nature” as well as on “faith in the role of consultation, of conference, of persuasion, of discussion, in formation of public opinion, which in the long run is self-corrective” (LW 14:227).

The main task of democracy (in the present as well as in the future) is to “create a freer and more human experience” that everyone can share and to which everyone can contribute, on the basis of their own resources and possibilities.

At the same time, the main task of each individual living in a democratic society is to contribute (on the basis of her/his capacities and possibilities) to maintaining the conditions of

associated life that nourish the active participation of each and everyone in the advancement of society, a duty which is particularly relevant in contemporary cultural and political scenarios.

References

Citations of John Dewey's works are to the thirty-seven-volume critical edition published by Southern Illinois University Press under the editorship of Jo Ann Boydston. In-text citations give the original publication date, series abbreviation, followed by volume number and page number. For example: (1934, LW 10:12) is page 12 of *Art as Experience*, which is published as volume 10 of *The Later Works*.

Series abbreviations for *The Collected Works*

EW *The Early Works* (1882–1898)

MW *The Middle Works* (1899–1924)

LW *The Later Works* (1925–1953)

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