

Oxford Handbooks Online

Dewey, the Ethics of Democracy, and the Challenge of Social Inclusion in Education

Maura Striano

The Oxford Handbook of Dewey

Edited by Steven Fesmire

Subject: Philosophy, History of Western Philosophy (Post-Classical), Social and Political Philosophy

Online Publication Date: Dec 2017 DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190491192.013.14

Abstract and Keywords

Human development, human rights, and social inclusion are currently among the main challenges for democratic life. John Dewey understood democracy not only as an individual and social task but also as a moral commitment to human growth deeply related to education. He identified reflective inquiry as both the backdrop of moral agency (in the form of reflective morality) and the method of social reconstruction aimed at assuring social justice and social inclusion through a shared understanding and exploration of individual and collective problems. Moreover, he advocated for new relationships between industry, schools, and society, envisaging the crucial role of education in the development of more inclusive societies. Dewey's approach suggests significant guidelines for contemporary democratic education in times of anxiety, disaffection, and distress since his insights anticipated crucial issues within current economic and sociopolitical debate on human and social growth and development.

Keywords: John Dewey, democracy, reflective morality, social justice, social inclusion, education

Dewey's Democratic Ideal in an Era of Global Democracy and Postdemocracy

A current progressive crisis of the democratic narrative in traditionally democratic countries and the failure of the attempts to export democracy in countries struggling for political and social change have been accompanied by the development and dissemination

Dewey, the Ethics of Democracy, and the Challenge of Social Inclusion in Education

of powerful counter narratives, which continuously challenge the faith in the democratic ideal (Habets 2015).

Moreover globalization, (neo-) liberalization, and privatization together with the development of processes of deregulation, weakening of collective organizations, and loss of collective organizational capacity have progressively eroded democracy from within and defined a postdemocratic scenario, especially for eastern Europe and North American democracies (Rancière 1995, 2002; Crouch 2004).

The risk of degeneration in “bad” forms of populism (Urbinati 2014), the rising power of the media, and the easy manipulation of public opinion (Luckacs 2005) are a constant menace for the maintenance of democracy intended as a pluralist and dialectic form of associated life, warranted by the mediating function of political institutions, individual responsibility, and commitment in the people.

Undoubtedly a decreasing trust in political life (Dalton 2008), negative media reports, disappointed citizens’ expectations, and a widespread perception of a weak performance of democratic governments has caused disaffection toward politics and democratic institutions (Pharr and Putnam 2000). This has required a sound exploration of the role of the public in the promotion and development of democracy (Barber 1998; Diamond 1994), highlighting the features of a democratic social order within which citizens should be educated for political engagement and participation by the civil society as a whole (Bahmuller and Patrick 1999).

Political engagement and participation require, first, the overcoming of all forms of social exclusion, which can be understood as a limitation in the use of different kinds of resources (economic, cultural, social, and structural) causing the deprivation of different forms of capital (financial, human, physical, and social) thereby excluding individuals and groups from access to earnings and wealth, educational opportunities, housing, social interactions, and political power.

This is caused by the presence of cultural and structural barriers to participation—both in the labor market and in society—due to a multidimensional process of progressive social rupture that detaches individuals and groups from institutions and social relations, preventing them from full participation in different types of social activities.

The narrative on democracy is therefore strictly connected to an emerging narrative on social justice and social inclusion, within which we can identify three different dimensions of inclusion defining a new paradigm for social growth, with cultural, practical, and political implications: (a) a socioeconomic dimension based on the categories of capability and participation (Sen 1989, Nussbaum and Sen 1993); (b) an ethical dimension referring to rights, social justice, equity, and equal opportunities based on the categories of difference and recognition (Nussbaum 1997, 2011b; Honneth 1994) and (c) an educational dimension based on the categories of care (Katz, Noddings, and Strike 1999), diversity (Appelbaum 2002), and reciprocity (Kirkness and Barnhardt 2001).

Dewey, the Ethics of Democracy, and the Challenge of Social Inclusion in Education

Current debate highlights the necessity to include a variety of perspectives and voices in the democratic discourse, which has generated the development of a dialogic (Giddens 1994, 1998) and inclusive idea of democracy (Young 2002) as well as the acknowledgment of the necessity of listening procedures to support processes of recognition, representation, and reconciliation (Dobson 2014).

While a number of scholars have advocated the need for a “deliberative” version of democracy that should support the construction of a rationally regulated communication and consensus organizing the public sphere (Habermas 1979; Bessette 1980; Bohman and Rehg 1997; Cohen 1997; Guttman and Thompson 2002), this vision has been challenged by others proposing a radical and agonistic version of democracy, taking into account that the process of construction of a democratic social order does not involve consensus but rather conflicts and dissent, which produce a continuous challenging of the oppressive power relations existing in societies (Laclau and Mouffe 1985).

Within this complex scenario, the very idea of democracy must be explored in depth, taking into account its nature and specificity and putting it in relationship with the ideas of social inclusion, social justice, and social development, the latter acknowledged as a process (natural or planned) involving the organization of institutions, resources, and social forces in an increasingly effective way in order to cope with the challenges imposed by the new world scenarios (Cleveland and Jacobs 1999).

Effective conceptual tools for this purpose can be found in Dewey’s understandings of democracy as an individual and social task, a moral challenge, an economic and political commitment, and a method of social inquiry. All of them help us in defining a vision of democracy as the main condition to promote and sustain social inclusion according to an emancipatory and participative vision of individual and social development.

The Premises of a Democratic Vision

The roots of Dewey’s democratic ideal can be found very early in his career, and are already clearly visible in the 1888 essay “The Ethics of Democracy” (Dewey 1888, EW 1)¹ where he identified the ethical implications of democracy intended as a form of associated life deeply committed to individual growth and to social development, as well as in *Outlines of a Critical Theory of Ethics*. (Dewey, 1891, EW 3). At that time Dewey had started to teach philosophy at the University of Michigan, where a contemporary observer, quoted by Westbrook, reported that he and “his mentor and colleague George Sylvester Morris” made the philosophy department “pervaded with a spirit of religious belief, unaffected, pure and independent” (Westbrook 1992, 405).²

During his Michigan years Dewey had also the opportunity to meet Jane Addams—a leading figure in the areas of social reform, women’s suffrage, and opposition to war—and to visit Hull House, the social and educational life support center for poor and

Dewey, the Ethics of Democracy, and the Challenge of Social Inclusion in Education

immigrant people that Addams cofounded in Chicago in 1889. As Stengel points out, “Dewey was searching for a way to instantiate his thinking about democracy, about Christianity and about experimentalism” and “it was at Hull House in the company of Jane Addams that Dewey found what he was looking for” (Stengel, in Cunningham et al. 2008, 29). When he moved to Chicago, Dewey’s relationship with Jane Addams and Hull House, for which he also became a trustee in 1894, grew deeper and, according to Fesmire, “educated” him in democracy and social life (Fesmire 2015).

As Fesenstein (2014) points out, “an important formative condition” of Dewey’s early ethical and political thinking was “the Idealist and New Liberal assault on the misguided individualism of the classical liberal tradition” accused of understanding social life as an “aggregation of inherently conflicting private interests,” while it had to be understood “as an organism in which the well-being of each part was tied to the well-being of the whole.” But according to Seigfried (1999, 207), Dewey’s criticisms of classical liberal individualism “are even more persuasive when seen in the context of the model of the intersubjective constitution of the individual that Addams develops from examining the relation of personal development to social interaction among the women residents of Hull House.”

As a consequence, in contrast with the liberal and positivist tradition, Dewey’s early political theory in “The Ethics of Democracy” builds up an organicist vision of the relationship between individual and society³ stating that “democracy approaches most nearly the ideal of all social organization; that in which the individual and society are organic to each other”; therefore, “the organism must have its spiritual organs; having a common will, it must express it” (1888, EW 1:238).⁴

Honneth notes that in this essay Dewey wants to counter “the tendency of the contemporary social philosophy to see in democracy just a mere organizational form of state government” and instead grounds democracy in the process of development of an intersubjective consciousness (Honneth and Farrell 1998, 767). This vision, still rooted in an Hegelian frame of reference, will be slowly dismissed when Dewey comes to realize that this approach “presupposes an untenable teleology of human nature.” It is for this reason that he will start, through various studies in psychology, “to work out the social mechanism that could explain, without metaphysical borrowings, the social compatibility of human self-realization” and elaborate a solution that “can be understood in terms of an intersubjectivist theory of human socialization” (Honneth and Farrell 1998, 771).⁵

Democracy as an Individual and Social Task

The encounter and deep friendship with George Herbert Mead was to further contribute to Dewey’s understanding of human mind as socially embedded and constructed. As Whipple (2005, 161) notes, “we can elucidate Dewey’s democratic ideal through

Dewey, the Ethics of Democracy, and the Challenge of Social Inclusion in Education

consideration of two of his key social-psychological principles: the experiential act of participation; and, most important for our purposes, his bilevel view of human agency, including habitual and reflective intelligence and the social origin of each.”

Accordingly, this approach sustains the development of a powerful notion of human agency intended in relation to individual and personality that Boyte and Finders (2016) see already clearly sketched in “The Ethics of Democracy,” where Dewey wrote: “in one word, democracy means that personality is the first and final reality” therefore “the full significance of personality can be learned by the individual only as it is already presented to him in objective form in society” and “the chief stimuli and encouragements to the realization of personality come from society.” Nonetheless, he continued, “personality cannot be procured for any one, however degraded and feeble, by any one else, however wise and strong” since “the spirit of personality indwells in every individual and that the choice to develop it must proceed from that individual” (1888, EW 1:244).⁶ This vision would be developed in Dewey’s psychological writings and later, with stronger ethical and political implications, in the 1922 publication *Human Nature and Conduct: An Introduction to Social Psychology*.

This idea of the “worth” of individual personality indeed is strictly connected with the concept of individual “capability” that Dewey clarified in his first ethical speculations⁷, as we can see in the essay “The Metaphysical Method in Ethics” where he wrote that “the ultimate end is the idea of a social universe in which every person’s capabilities shall receive their full realization, and in which every person’s realization shall contribute to every other person’s realization” (1896, EW 5:32).⁸

Dewey’s notion of capability as the core of a democratic process of social growth is extremely powerful and can be an important contribution to deeper understanding and development of current trends either in economic or in sociopolitical and ethical studies, which are interconnected in the definition of sustainable perspectives of human and social growth and development. This focus on intersubjectivity makes it essential to understand democracy as a shared enterprise grounded in mutual and reciprocal benefits and responsibilities, defining it as a moral challenge for everyone.

Democracy as a Moral Challenge

Dewey wrote in “The Ethics of Democracy” that “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” (1888, EW 1:240).⁹ This means that the choice of democracy as a form of government derives from its being a by-product of morally valuable and spiritually enriching human agency and conduct, as well as the best condition to foster

Dewey, the Ethics of Democracy, and the Challenge of Social Inclusion in Education

them. Therefore, the development of a theory of democracy requires a theory of ethics, which Dewey believed should be scientifically grounded.

The central idea that interconnects Dewey's theory of democracy with his ethical inquiry is the idea of "growth," which is a consequence of his early organicist vision of the social body and therefore requires the situating of individual and collective conduct within an experiential framework, through a scientific approach that complements a philosophical and practical exploration.¹⁰ A better social order can be achieved through a collective and intersubjective commitment to a shared project of growth for every person.

In the first edition of his *Ethics*, published in 1908, Dewey explains that the main focus and purpose of a theory of ethics should be that of "providing methods for analysing and resolving concrete individual and social situations, rather than of furnishing injunctions and precepts"; in this perspective it should not depend upon fixed values, ideals, standards, and laws but rather be committed to their construction, de-construction and re-construction, and therefore be understood as "a working method for the self-regulation of the individual and of society" focusing on specific social motives (1908, MW 5:57).

Within this framework the main "working social motive" emerging on the basis of the development of a "more generous sense of inherent social relationships" is for Dewey "social justice" considered as "the result of increase of human intercourse, democratic institutions, and biological science" (1908, MW 5:374).

It is interesting to see how Dewey here uses an organismic metaphor derived from biological science applied to human society to explain that the "only ultimate protection against disease is in the general 'resisting power' of the living process." This power "may be temporarily aided by stimulation or surgery, but the ultimate source of its renewal is found in the steady rebuilding of new structures to replace the old stagnation; the retention of broken-down tissues means weakness and danger" (1908, MW 5:540). Social justice is therefore the outcome of a self-renewing and self-healing process of the social organism intended as a growing living creature.

This requires both a scientific analysis of the causes and of the conditions that undermine the full realization of social justice,¹¹ as well as the reconstruction of intersubjective relationships in terms of "sympathy" and "love," which are human attitudes as well as moral values. Therefore, at the roots of each process of social growth there should be a mechanism of individual and collective moral engagement, resulting from the joint endeavor of a scientific inquiry and of moral reconstruction of social bounds, institutions, and structures.

Accordingly, Anderson (2014) explains that Dewey accomplished a reconstruction of 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." This approach is also consistent with Dewey's criticisms of the discontinuity and separation from the world of facts and the realm of values, which,

Dewey, the Ethics of Democracy, and the Challenge of Social Inclusion in Education

as Putnam highlights, would become a distinctive character of pragmatist thought (Putnam, 2002).

Pappas (2008, 541) notes that “the impoverished quality of present moral experience was the underlying concern behind Dewey’s democratic vision” and offered to it “plausibility” and “function,” but it also offered a broader scope including “habit, character, interaction, communication, and the qualitative dimension of situations.”

In the 1932 revised edition of his *Ethics*, Dewey draws a distinction between a “customary morality” and “reflective morality.” The first one grounds standards and rules of conduct within an “ancestral habit,” while the second “appeals to conscience, reason, or to some principle which includes thought” (1932, LW 7:162). This distinction “shifts the centre of gravity in morality” grounding it on explicit, shared, and validated forms of judgment reflectively constructed (163).

Hickman (1998. xvi) notes that Dewey’s ethics is “the flower of both his aesthetic theory and his theory of inquiry.” Accordingly, analyzing the section of Dewey’s 1932 *Ethics* titled “The Conception of Virtue in Reflective Morality,” Garrison (2004) highlights how Dewey focuses on individual virtues, understanding them within a cultural and social context that offers the possibility to appreciate (in an aesthetical perspective) the different individual contributions to social growth.

Fesmire (1999, 534) highlights the aesthetic and imaginative features of Dewey’s moral theory and their implication for his democratic vision: “since our aspirations are not isolated from those of others” 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.”

For Dewey, the exercise of a “reflective morality” requires specific conditions and opportunities as well as a method, “the method of democracy, of a positive toleration which amounts to sympathetic regard for the intelligence and personality of others, even if they hold views opposed to ours, and of scientific inquiry into facts and testing of ideas” (1932, LW 7:329).

The notion of reflective morality is therefore central in his vision of democracy as (a) a form of associated life that must be constructed on the basis of dialogue, shared judgment, co-construction and negotiation of norms and values, and joint exploration of issues and problems and (b) a method of conduct and of inquiry that provides the conditions for reflective morality to be expressed and developed.

Industrial Democracy and New Liberalism

Dewey, the Ethics of Democracy, and the Challenge of Social Inclusion in Education

Dewey's moral vision is in deep relationship with his early vision of democracy and its impact on economic and social growth. After the Civil War American society was, as Anderson points out, rapidly changing "from a rural to an urban society, from an agricultural to an industrial economy, from a regional to a world power." (Anderson 2014, online) These changes were determining a strong tension between very different and sometimes opposite inner trends. "It emancipated its slaves, but subjected them to white supremacy. It absorbed millions of immigrants from Europe and Asia, but faced wrenching conflicts between capital and labor as they were integrated into the urban industrial economy. It granted women the vote, but resisted their full integration into educational and economic institutions. As the face-to-face communal life of small villages and towns waned, it confronted the need to create new forms of community life capable of sustaining democracy on urban and national scales." These new social conditions called for new forms of social order and new moral and ethical grounds, and Dewey became clearly aware that "neither traditional moral norms nor traditional philosophical ethics were up to the task of coping with the problems raised by these dramatic transformations" (Anderson 2014, online).

Within this framework he developed a vision of democracy strictly connected with equitable economic and social development sustained as Westbrook points out, by a strong commitment to social justice and a profound faith in deliberative citizenship (Westbrook, 1991), which he developed and refined both in conversations with Jane Addams as well as through a confrontation with contemporary studies in politics and social sciences (such as those of Westel Woodbury Willoughby, the father of modern political science in the United States, and Leonard Hobhouse, the leading thinker of British "social liberalism").¹²

Indeed Jane Addams' vision of democracy as a "rule of living and a test of faith" (Addams 1907) and her awareness that "uncontrolled industrial capitalism was the primary cause of domestic and international violence" (Addams 1907, 27-28) are consistent with Dewey's understanding of the limits of industrial capitalism, which required reframing according to a democratic ideal.

Dewey's vision was also, as Westbrook (1992) points out, deeply influenced by the cooperativist perspective of the economist Henry Carter Adams, which led Dewey to envision, as a conclusion of "The Ethics of Democracy," the possibility of an "industrial, civil and political" endeavor based on the principle that "all industrial relations are to be regarded as subordinate to human relations" (1888, EW 1:247).

These relations "are to become the material of an ethical realization; the form and substance of a community of good (though not necessarily of goods) wider than any now known" (Dewey 1888, EW 1:248), as well as a "community of wealth" that Dewey saw as a necessity to accomplish the democratic ideal, overcoming the class divisions of industrial capitalism in favor of a society committed to the full realization of individual and collective growth.¹³

Dewey, the Ethics of Democracy, and the Challenge of Social Inclusion in Education

This has also educational implications as Dewey highlighted in the essay “The Need of an Industrial Education in an Industrial Democracy” (Dewey, 1916b, MW 10).

In a letter to Cork (1949, 450), he pointed out that “no existing brand of socialism has worked out an adequate answer to the question of *how* industry and finance can progressively be conducted in the widest possible interest and not for the benefit of one class” and defined himself “a democratic socialist.” Accordingly, he did not frame his project of an “industrial democracy” in terms of class struggle since he didn’t follow a Marxist approach (as pointed out in “Why I Am Not a Communist” (Dewey, 1934, LW 9) but rather, as explained in *Liberalism and Social Action*, in terms of a process of advancement in the “liberation from material insecurity and from the coercions and repressions that prevent multitudes from participation in the vast cultural resources that are at hand.” Dewey was aware that the process was slow, and 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 he assigned a “mediating function,” as it places a strong emphasis “upon the role of freed intelligence as the method of directing social action” (1935, LW 11:37).¹⁴

He strongly advocated for the construction of “a social order” with the chief purpose of establishing the conditions that will move the mass of individuals “to appropriate and use the cultural, the spiritual, resources” that are the product “of the cooperative work of humanity” and therefore affirmed that the most urgent task to be fulfilled was to promote “the socialized extension of intelligence” as well as the socialized use of cultural and spiritual resources that belong to each and every one (1935, LW 11:39).

Democracy, Education, and the Socialized Extension of Intelligence

For Dewey the reconstruction of social order requires also an educational project aiming at reconstructing human habits and conducts on the basis of a psychological understanding of human growth and agency. This issue was explored in depth in *The School and Society* (1899, MW 1), which addresses two fundamental questions: (a) How can a society be disciplined, organized, ruled in such a manner that all its members can be protected, satisfied, and sustained, while actively and responsibly participating in its development? (b) How can a society develop and grow according to its intrinsic potential?

In a Deweyan perspective, social order is not a matter of general rules imposed on a society from the outside or from above. It is, instead, a matter of individual and collective awareness, reflectivity, and responsibility. For these reasons, an effective social order can be achieved only if and when more and more individuals and groups become able to deal with social problems in a reasonable and reflective manner, using a disciplined method of

Dewey, the Ethics of Democracy, and the Challenge of Social Inclusion in Education

inquiry into human experiences and relationships. Accordingly, the need for a social order (which is a social need) becomes an educational need as also pointed out in *The Schools of Tomorrow* (Dewey, 1915 MW 8).

In *Democracy and Education* Dewey states that “the extension in space of the number of individuals who participate in an interest so that each has to refer his own action to that of others, and to consider the action of others to give point and direction to his own, is equivalent to the breaking down of those barriers of class, race, and national territory which kept men from perceiving the full import of their activity” (1916a, MW 9:93).¹⁵ The full involvement and participation in the process of construction of societies at all levels and in all dimensions (cultural, economic, political), as well as the effective communication and dissemination of ideas, knowledge, and proposals, requires a “society which is mobile, which is full of channels for the distribution of a change occurring anywhere” and which takes care that all “its members are educated to personal initiative and adaptability.” This is because the moral and ideal meaning of democracy “is that a social return be demanded from all and that opportunity for development of distinctive capacities be afforded all” (MW 9:94).

Democracy demands a contribution from each and every person on the basis of the different attitudes, capabilities, and potentialities that each brings into the social arena, through the acknowledgement of equal opportunities of growth, commitment, and participation. According to this approach, social reconstruction requires not only the management and adoption of a method¹⁶ suitable for detecting and exploring social problems, identifying possible solutions following, as Metz points out, a scientific pattern (Metz, 1969) but also the construction of collaborative spaces of inquiry and of deliberation within which hypotheses and plans can be criticized, discussed, tested, and evaluated.

As Vanderveen (2011, 160) suggests, “Dewey provides an account of experimental political inquiry,” which implies the legitimation and participation of multiple actors to the process of inquiry. Inquiry, which represents the intelligent and reflective management of social issues through their critical analysis, problematization, and exploration in order to gain understanding and define hypotheses for possible solutions, emerges through the medium of culture and is developed by involving multiple forms of knowledge and understanding that are inherently social.

In *The Public and its Problems* Dewey explains that “the formation of states must be an experimental process. The trial process may go on with diverse degrees of blindness and accident, and at the cost of unregulated procedures of cut and try, of fumbling and groping, without insight into what men are after or clear knowledge of a good state even when it is achieved. Or it may proceed more intelligently, because guided by knowledge of the conditions which must be fulfilled. But it is still experimental and since conditions of action and of inquiry and knowledge are always changing, the experiment must always be retried; the State must always be rediscovered” (1927, LW 2:257). Inquiry is therefore the condition for the construction, maintenance, and development of the state according

Dewey, the Ethics of Democracy, and the Challenge of Social Inclusion in Education

to a “pluralistic conception,” but it is necessary that “the tools of social inquiry” are forged in places and under conditions close to contemporary events (349) and that “concepts, general principles, theories and dialectical developments which are indispensable to any systematic knowledge be shaped and tested as tools of inquiry.” Moreover, “policies and proposals for social action” have to “be treated as working hypotheses” and “be experimental in the sense that they will be entertained subject to constant and well-equipped observation of the consequences they entail when acted upon, and subject to ready and flexible revision in the light of observed consequences” (362).

In this perspective, inquiry comes out of social contexts and contributes to reconstructing and to reorganizing them because a growing number of individuals and groups begin to explore the possibility to overcome and make sense of the conditions they live in. Inquiry may become, therefore, a means to support and sustain social order, since it emerges from the inside of society itself and is controlled by means of dedicated inquiry procedures.

This approach highlights the essential role of public participation in the detection and analysis of social issues and problems, as well as in the selection of the best courses of action to be followed and in the evaluation of their outcomes and results in terms of social growth. Therefore “the essential need, in other words, is the improvement of the methods and conditions of debate, discussion and persuasion” which “depends essentially upon freeing and perfecting the processes of inquiry and of dissemination of their conclusions” (Dewey 1927, LW 2:366).

Every person is entitled, legitimated, and morally obliged to participate in the processes of inquiry and deliberation that sustain social growth in a democratic society. The “Democratic Ideal” that Dewey sketches out in *Democracy and Education* involves indeed two 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” (1916a, MW 9:92). In a democratic society “voluntary disposition and interest” are the only regulative moral principles of what Dewey calls “associated life.”

Democracy, Social Justice, and the Challenge of Social Inclusion

As Stengel (2009, 89) notes, “Dewey speaks in a voice we can still hear today,” because in the fabric of his writings we can find embedded ideas that are part of the ongoing discourse. Significant similarities can be found between Dewey’s vision and the “capability approach” to economic and social development proposed by Amartya Sen in the early 1980s and its ethical implications in terms of social justice according to the framework defined by Martha Nussbaum in the early 1990s. Indeed, as Zimmerman (2006, 470–471) points out, “Sen shows—like Dewey—that the concept of freedom and capabilities (in the sense of capability to act and interact) are analytically related” and this is connected to “an understanding of the individual” as “a person who has ideas about what is good for her, who pursues specific aims and performs choices” addressing therefore the person from the point of view of her agency, recognizing “her ability to conceive and fulfil aims, commitments and values, and not only selfish desires” therefore connecting individual interests and social ends.

In contrast with utilitarianism (an understanding of human agency and rational action that overcomes reduction to personal interest), a vision of the embeddedness of individual agency within complexity and social diversity are elements that ground the capability approach in pragmatism. In particular, they ground Dewey’s vision of individual and social development and his idea of individual and collective agency as reflectively oriented. This has not only economic and sociopolitical implications but also educational ones.

In this perspective, Glassman and Patton (2014) see significant relationships between Sen’s capabilities approach framework for understanding the human condition and Dewey’s democratic vision and educational ideas, acknowledging how together education and democratic values may play important roles in creating contexts that allow individuals and communities to recognize a wide array of human capabilities and to expand them through participatory engagement into processes or economic and social growth, envisaging also a relationship with Freire’s pedagogy.

According to the “capability approach” the success or failure of different political systems, as well as the processes of globalization, democratization, development, and economic growth, can be determined taking into account five essential conditions: (a) real freedom in the assessment of a person’s advantage, (b) the valorization of individual differences in the transformation of resources into valuable activities, (c) the presence of multivariate activities aimed at producing and maintaining happiness and well-being, (d) a balance of materialistic and nonmaterialistic factors in human welfare, and (e) a shared concern for the distribution of opportunities within society (Sen 1989; Sen in, Nussbaum and Sen 1993).

Dewey, the Ethics of Democracy, and the Challenge of Social Inclusion in Education

Nussbaum (2011) puts the capability approach “to work in constructing a theory of basic social justice,” adding other notions to the process (such as those of human dignity, the threshold, and political liberalism). She presents a specific list of “central capabilities” that distinguishes between internal and combined capabilities with reference to “two overlapping but distinct tasks of the decent society,” which make it possible that, for example, “some societies educate people so that they are capable of free speech on political matters—internally—but then deny them free expression in practice through repression of speech.” This distinction is a “useful heuristic in diagnosing the achievements and shortcomings of a society” (Nussbaum 2011a, 21) and in focusing on the basic capabilities that “a minimally just society will endeavour to nurture and support” (28). In this perspective the notion of capability is a useful benchmark to identify democratic societies as those within which the development of basic capabilities is assured and internal capabilities can be fully expressed as combined capabilities.

The capability approach is therefore evaluative and ethical and is very close to Dewey’s understanding of democracy, but while Nussbaum focuses on the relationship between individuals and society, Dewey focuses on the relationship among individuals as the context within which the full realization of each individual capability is essential to those of the others. This concept is expressed very clearly in the essay “Philosophy and Democracy” where Dewey explains that equality, in a democratic perspective, does not mean equivalence, which dissolves individual differences and diversities, but, according to a moral and social understanding, it means rather “the inapplicability of considerations of greater and less, superior and inferior”; this implies that “differences of ability, strength, position, wealth” are negligible in comparison with the uniqueness of individual existence, which “must be reckoned with on its own account, not as something capable of equation with and transformation into something else.” This vision provides therefore a “metaphysical mathematics of the incommensurable in which each speaks for itself and demands consideration on its own behalf”; accordingly, “democracy is concerned not with freaks or geniuses or heroes or divine leaders but with associated individuals in which each by intercourse with others somehow makes the life of each more distinctive” (Dewey 1919, MW 11:53).

Dewey’s emphasis on the uniqueness of the individual, on differences and diverse “capabilities,” and his criticisms of visions of society such as those provided by social Darwinism, which had applied the biological categories of “struggle for existence” and “the survival of the fittest” to the analysis of social and political processes, make his ideas extremely powerful in forming the basis for an inclusive vision of social growth.

This accent on individual uniqueness and diversity is particularly relevant within current cultural, political, and social debates focused on the necessity to assure and acknowledge social equity and social justice not in terms of equivalence of rights, opportunities, and treatment but in terms of balance between individual equality and diversity, which must be developed and sustained mainly through educational processes.

Dewey, the Ethics of Democracy, and the Challenge of Social Inclusion in Education

In the essay “Education and Social Direction” 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” (1918, MW 11:58).

The individual focus of educational processes and practices connects Dewey’s vision to current debates on inclusive education intended not as a response to special needs but as an educational approach focused on the valorization of individual differences. Moreover, his insights can provide a fruitful contribution to contemporary debates on social inclusion and education, a contribution that highlights the difference between the perspective of “integration,” which is linear, static, and based on processes of assimilation, on the one hand, and the perspective of inclusion, which is bidirectional, dynamic, co-evolutive, and transactional, on the other (Oliver 1990; Booth and Ainscow 2011).

This requires, as Noddings (1999) points out, a deep reframing of the liberalist grounds of educational theories and practices, taking into account the weaknesses of liberalism without losing its great strengths. Dewey’s understanding of liberalism as a means for the full achievement of individual and collective freedom—very different from the classic liberal approach grounded on the assumption of the isolated, autonomous individual as the subject of rights—is useful to highlight the strengths and limits of current interpretations of liberalism -either in its “perfectionist” or in its “political” version, according to the framework defined by Nussbaum (2011b). Dewey’s approach highlights liberalism’s economic, educational, moral, political, and social implications through a reflective and socially shared pattern of inquiry.

Dewey’s attention to the value of the community as the dimension within which it is possible to start deconstructing and reconstructing the cultural fabric that is the foundation for public opinion, and his struggle for freedom of individual and collective intelligence (which highlights its critical and creative potential), opens up a dialogue with the approaches of contemporary critical theory (Kadlec 2008; Joas 1992) to social and educational inquiry. Moreover, Dewey’s vision of social justice and of social growth highlights the necessity to work out either a sound scientific exploration of the conditions underlying social inequalities or a reconstruction of social bonds and social relationships according to a new frame of shared values. It opens up the possibility to understand “resistance” and power issues by focusing on a transactional vision of human intercourse (Abowitz 2000).

Contemporary issues of social inclusion and social justice, according to Dewey’s legacy, have to be approached by using a “dialogue through differences,” which involves different perspectives and different kinds of agents at various levels (Stengel 2009; Cunningham et al., 2008; Thrupp and Tomlinson 2005) but also through the

Dewey, the Ethics of Democracy, and the Challenge of Social Inclusion in Education

reconstruction of individual and collective practices of inquiry and interaction, focusing on the multiple and complex dimensions of individual and collective experience, understood—in a Deweyan perspective—as the “foreground” of human existence.

Dewey’s idea of democracy is inclusive and participative (Seigfried 1996; Fischer 2012) and opens up the possibility of a new understanding of his legacy in terms of some contemporary “inclusive” and “deliberative” visions of the democratic task (Young 2002). Moreover, as Bernstein (1985) points out, Dewey’s idea of a democratic society is pluralistic, even if according to Talisse (2003) the term “pluralistic,” in a Deweyan and pragmatist approach, can be interpreted ambiguously. Nonetheless, it is true that Dewey provides us with a multiperspectival and fallibilist vision of the processes of social inquiry, which should be continuously maintained in order to sustain democracy, intended as a form of communication, inquiry, and deliberation deeply committed to individual and collective social agency and to an inclusive and participative process of social growth.

This vision, based both in “faith in human nature” as well as “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” (Dewey 1939, LW 14:227)—as Dewey states in “Creative Democracy, the Task Before Us”—is extremely powerful and can help us to escape the risk of conceiving Dewey’s democratic vision as an external frame of reference, understanding its cultural, economic, political, and social implications within currently complex scenarios. Only on these bases could it be possible to relaunch democracy as a project to be sustained in order to warrant to individuals and communities the best conditions to live and grow thanks to the personal commitment and engagement of everyone.

Works Cited

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)

Abowitz, K. K. (2000). “A Pragmatist Revisioning of Resistance Theory.” *American Educational Research Journal*, vol. 37, no. 4, 877–907.

Addams, J. (1907). *Newer Ideals of Peace*. New York: Macmillan.

Dewey, the Ethics of Democracy, and the Challenge of Social Inclusion in Education

Anderson, E. (2014). "Dewey's Moral Philosophy." In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Edited by E. N. Zalta. <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/dewey-moral/>

Appelbaum, P. (2002). *Multicultural and Diversity Education: A Reference Handbook*. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO.

Bahmuller, C. F., and Patrick J. (Eds.) (1999). *Principles and Practices of Education for Democratic Citizenship: International Perspectives and Projects*. Bloomington, IN: Eric.

Barber, B. (1998). *A Passion for Democracy: American Essays*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Bessette, J. (1980). "Deliberative Democracy: The Majority Principle in Republican Government." *How Democratic is the Constitution?* Edited by R. Goldwin and W. Shambra. Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute.

Bernstein, R. J. (1985). "Current Issues in Education." *Varieties of Pluralism*, vol. 5, 1-21.

Bohman, J., and Rehg, W. (1997). *Deliberative Democracy: Essays on Reason and Politics*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Booth, T., and Ainscow, M. (2011). *Index for Inclusion: Developing Learning and Participation in Schools*. Bristol, UK: Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education.

Boyte, H. C., and Finders, M. J. (2016). "A Liberation of Powers: Agency and Education for Democracy." *Educational Theory*, vol. 66, nos. 1-2, 127-146.

Campbell, J. (1984). "Dewey's Method of Social Reconstruction." *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, vol. 20, no. 4, 363-393.

Cleveland, H., and Jacobs, G. (1999). "Human Choice: The Genetic Code for Social Development." *Futures*, vol. 31, nos. 9-10, 959-970.

Cohen, J. (1997). "Deliberation and Democratic Legitimacy." In *Deliberative Democracy: Essays on Reason and Politics*. Edited by J. Bohman and W. Rehg, 67-92. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Cork, J. (1949). "John Dewey, Karl Marx and Democratic Socialism." *The Antioch Review*, vol. 9, no. 4, 435-452.

Crouch, C. (2004). *Post-Democracy*. London: Wiley.

Cunningham, C. A., Granger, D., Fowler Morse, J., Stengel, B., and Wilson, T. (2008). "Dewey, Women, and Weirdoes: or, the Potential Rewards for Scholars Who Dialogue across Difference." *Education and Culture*, vol. 23, no. 2, 27-62.

Dalton, R. J. (2008). *Citizen Politics: Public Opinion and Political Parties in Advanced Industrial Democracies*. London: SAGE.

Dewey, the Ethics of Democracy, and the Challenge of Social Inclusion in Education

- Dewey, J. (1888). "The Ethics of Democracy." EW 1.
- Dewey, J. (1891). "Outlines of a Critical Theory of Ethics." EW 3.
- Dewey, J. (1896). "The Metaphysical Method in Ethics." EW 5.
- Dewey, J. (1899). *The Schools and Society*. MW 1.
- Dewey, J. (1908). *Ethics*. MW 5.
- Dewey, J. (1915). *The Schools of Tomorrow*. MW 8.
- Dewey, J. (1916a). *Democracy and Education*. MW 9.
- Dewey, J. (1916b). "The Need of an Industrial Education in an Industrial Democracy." MW 10.
- Dewey, J. (1918). "Education and Social Direction." MW 11.
- Dewey, J. (1919). "Philosophy and Democracy." MW 11.
- Dewey, J. (1922). *Human Nature and Conduct*. MW 14.
- Dewey, J. (1927). *The Public and Its Problems*. LW 2.
- Dewey, J. (1932). *Ethics*, rev ed. LW 7.
- Dewey, J. (1934). *Why I Am Not a Communist*. LW 9.
- Dewey, J. (1935). *Liberalism and Social Action*. LW 11.
- Dewey, J. (1939). "Creative Democracy. The Task Before Us." LW 14.
- Dewey, Jane M. (1939). "Biography of John Dewey." In *The Philosophy of John Dewey*. Edited by P. A. Schlipp. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.
- Diamond, L. (1994). *Nationalism, Ethnic Conflict, and Democracy*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Dobson, A. (2014). *Listening for Democracy: Recognition, Representation, Reconciliation*. Oxford: Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Fesmire, S. (1999). "Morality as Art: Dewey, Metaphor, and Moral Imagination." *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, vol. 35, no. 3, 527-550.
- Fesmire, S. (2015). *Dewey*. Abingdon, UK and New York: Routledge.
- Festenstein, M. (2014). "Dewey's Political Philosophy." In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Edited by E. N. Zalta. <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/dewey-political/>

Dewey, the Ethics of Democracy, and the Challenge of Social Inclusion in Education

Fischer, C. C. (2012). "Pragmatists, Deliberativists, and Democracy: The Quest for Inclusion." *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, vol. 26, no. 3, 497–515.

Garrison, J. W. (1999). "John Dewey." In *Encyclopedia of Philosophy of Education*. <http://www.ffst.hr/ENCYCLOPAEDIA/11/10/1999>

Garrison, J. W. (2004). "The Aesthetics of Ethical Virtues and the Ethical Virtues of Aesthetics." *Interchange*, vol. 35, no. 2, 229–241.

Giddens, A. (1994). *Beyond Left and Right: The Future of Radical Politics*. London: Wiley.

Id. (1998). *The Third Way: The Renewal of Social Democracy*. London: Wiley.

Glassman, M., and Patton, R. (2014). "Capability Through Participatory Democracy: Sen, Freire and Dewey." *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, vol. 46, no. 12, 1353–1365.

Good, J. A. (2006). *A Search for Unity in Diversity: The "Permanent Hegelian Deposit" in the Philosophy of John Dewey*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.

Guttman, A., and Thompson, D. (2002). "Deliberative Democracy Beyond Process." *Journal of Political Philosophy*, vol. 10, no. 2, 153–174.

Habermas, J. (1979). "The Crisis of Late Capitalism and the Future of Democracy: An Interview with J. Habermas." *Telos: Critical Theory of the Contemporary*, vol. 39, 163–171.

Habets, I. (2015). "Liberal Democracy: The Threat of Counter-Narratives." *European View*, vol. 14, no. 2, 145–154.

Hickman, L. (Ed.). (1998). *Reading Dewey: Interpretations for a Postmodern Generation*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Honneth, A. (1994). *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Honneth, A., and Farrell, J. M. M. (1998). "Democracy as Reflexive Cooperation: John Dewey and the Theory of Democracy Today." *Political Theory*, vol. 26, no. 6, 763–783.

Laclau, E., and Mouffe, C. (1985). *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*. London: Verso.

Luckacs, J. (2005). *Democracy and Populism. Fear and Hatred*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Joas, H. (1992). "An Underestimated Alternative: America and the Limits of 'Critical Theory.'" *Symbolic Interaction*, vol. 15, no. 3, 261–275.

Kadlec, A. (2008). "Critical Pragmatism and Deliberative Democracy." *Theoria: A Journal of Social and Political Theory*, vol. 117, 54–80.

Dewey, the Ethics of Democracy, and the Challenge of Social Inclusion in Education

Katz, M. S., Noddings, N., and Strike, K. A. (1999). *Justice and Caring: The Search for Common Ground in Education*. New York and London: Teacher College Press.

Kirkness, V. J., and Barnhardt, R. (2001). *First Nations and Higher Education: The Four R's Respect, Relevance, Reciprocity, Responsibility*. https://www.cwu.edu/teaching-learning/sites/cts.cwu.edu/teaching-learning/files/documents/first_nations.pdf.

Metz, J. G. (1969). "Democracy and the Scientific Method in the Philosophy of John Dewey." *The Review of Politics*, vol. 31, no. 2, 242-262.

Miller, D. (1999). *Principles of Social Justice*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Noddings N. (1999). "Renewing Democracy in Schools." *Phi Delta Kappan*, vol. 80, no. 8, 579-583.

Nussbaum, M. (1997). "Capabilities and Human Rights." *Fordham Law Review*, vol. 66, no. 2, 273-300.

Nussbaum, M. (2011a). *Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press.

Nussbaum, M. (2011b). "Perfectionist Liberalism and Political Liberalism." *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, vol. 39, no. 1, 3-45. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1088-4963.2011.01200.x>

1088-4963.2011.01200.x

Nussbaum, M., and Sen, A. (Eds.). (1993). *The Quality of Life*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Oliver, M. (1990). *The Politics of Disablement*. London: Macmillan.

Pappas, G. (2008). *John Dewey's Ethics: Democracy as Experience*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Pharr, S. J., and Putnam, R. D. (2000). *Disaffected Democracies: What's Troubling the Trilateral Countries?* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Putnam, H. (2002). *The Collapse of the Fact/Value Dichotomy and Other Essays*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Putnam, H., and Putnam, R. A. (1993). "Educating for Democracy." *Educational Theory*, vol. 43, no. 4, 361-376.

Rancière, J. (1995). *La méésentente: Politique et Philosophie*. Paris: Editions Galilée.

Rancière, J. (2002). "Éclipse de la politique." *L'Humanité*. <http://www.humanite.fr/node/265950>

Rockefeller, S. C. (1989). "John Dewey, Spiritual Democracy and the Human Future." *CrossCurrents*, vol. 39, no. 3, 300-321.

Dewey, the Ethics of Democracy, and the Challenge of Social Inclusion in Education

Seigfried, C. H. (1996). *Pragmatism and Feminism: Reweaving the Social Fabric*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Seigfried, C. H. (1999). "Socializing Democracy: Jane Addams and John Dewey." *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, vol. 29, no. 2, 207–230.

Sen, A. (1989). "Development as Capability Expansion." *Journal of Development Planning*, vol. 19, 41–58.

Sen A. (1993). Capability and Well-Being. In: *The Quality of Life*, Edited by M. Nussbaum, A. Sen. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Stengel, B. S. (2009). "John Dewey at 150: Reflections for a New Century." *Education and Culture*, vol. 25, no. 2, 89–100.

Talisse, R. (2003). "Can Democracy Be a Way of Life?" *Transactions of the C. S. Peirce Society*, vol. 39, no. 1, 1–21.

Thrupp, M., and Tomlinson, S. (2005). "Education Policy, Social Justice and 'Complex Hope.'" *British Educational Research Journal*, vol. 31, no. 5, 549–556.

Urbinati, N. (2014). *Democracy Disfigured: Opinion, Truth and the People*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Venderveen, Z. (2011). "John Dewey's Experimental Politics: Inquiry and Legitimacy." *Transactions of the C. S. Peirce Society*, vol. 47, no. 2, 158–181.

Višňovský, E., and Zolcer, S. (2016). "Dewey's Participatory Educational Democracy." *Educational Theory*, vol. 66, nos. 1–2, 55–71.

Whipple, M. (2005). "The Dewey-Lippmann Debate Today: Communication Distortions, Reflective Agency, and Participatory Democracy." *Sociological Theory*, vol. 23, no. 2, 156–178.

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

Westbrook, R. B. (1992). "Schools for Industrial Democrats: The Social Origins of John Dewey's Philosophy of Education." *American Journal of Education*, vol. 100, no. 4, 401–419.

Young, I. M. (2002). *Inclusion and Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

Zimmerman, B. (2006). "Pragmatism and the Capability Approach. Challenges in Social Theory and Empirical Research." *European Journal of Social Theory*, vol. 9, no. 4, 467–484.

Dewey, the Ethics of Democracy, and the Challenge of Social Inclusion in Education

Notes:

(¹) As Višňovský and Zolcer (2016, 57) point out, the development of Dewey's democratic theory can be reconstructed by following an articulated genealogy composed of two stages—early and mature—embedding political, ethical, philosophical, and even religious elements, which are interwoven in a complex fabric that incorporates different forms of discourse and different narratives.

(²) Garrison (1999, 2) reminds us that those were spiritually intense years: "Dewey was active in the Student Christian Association and was a member of the First Congregational Church where he taught Bible classes"; accordingly his "interests in social, political, and economic issues grew increasingly radical as he continued to struggle with issues of unity and religion." Moreover, his marriage, in 1886 to his "self-reliant and politically progressive" student Alice Chipman "seems to have awakened Dewey's deeply ingrained sense of social justice and encouraged his entrance into the world of public affairs."

(³) We can see this clearly stated in this passage "the student of society has constantly to be on his guard against the abstract and purely mechanical notions introduced from the physical sciences" since "men cannot be reduced for political purposes, any more than. for any other, to bare figure ones" and "a vote is not an impersonal counting of one; it is a manifestation of some tendency of the social organism through a member of that organism" (Dewey, 1988, EW 1: 233-234).

(⁴) Therefore "in democracy, at all events, the governors and the governed are not two classes, but two aspects of the same fact—the fact of the possession by society of a unified and articulate will. It means that government is the organ of society, and is as comprehensive as society" (Dewey, 1988, EW 1:239).

(⁵) Indeed, as Good points out, between 1887 to 1891 Dewey did not abandon Hegel but rather abandoned his previous Neo-Hegelianism, and his break with Neo-Hegelianism involved a growing interest in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, which clearly influenced his psychological account of human agency and growth (Good, 2006). This idea was a powerful factor in producing Dewey's belief "that the not uncommon assumption in both psychology and philosophy of a ready-made mind over against a physical world as an object has no empirical support" and grounded his understanding "that the only possible psychology, as distinct from a biological account of behavior, is a social psychology" (Dewey, 1939, 17-18).

(⁶) This perspective has deep ethical consequences because from it "result the other notes of democracy, liberty, equality, fraternity—words that are not mere words to catch the mob, but symbols of the highest ethical idea which humanity has yet reached—the idea that personality is the one thing of permanent and abiding worth, and that in every human individual there lies personality" (Dewey, 1988, EW 1: 244).

Dewey, the Ethics of Democracy, and the Challenge of Social Inclusion in Education

(⁷) As Rockefeller (1989, 302), notes, “starting with Protestant Christian social values and the Neo Hegelian philosophy of the organic unity of the spiritual and the material, the ideal and the real,” Dewey developed “his own philosophy of individual liberation, social transformation, and harmony with the divine”; within this framework “as he reconstructed his early Neo-Hegelian ethical idealism and developed a new brand of humanistic naturalism, which charts a middle way between a tough-minded and tender-minded world view, the idea of democracy remained of central importance” and acquired a strong spiritual connotation.

(⁸) As Leys explains in the introduction to the fourth volume of the Early Works, “Dewey was himself seeking a psychological description of the life process that would relate the empirical findings of physiologists and sociologists to man’s consciousness of value, but he insisted that a psychological description “cannot involve a different principle.” Therefore, “he believed that he had found the ‘mediating’ standpoint in ‘action’ or ‘activity.’” (Leys, in EW 4: xv). This focus on action and activity highlights the fact that Dewey’s early account of democracy has strong ethical implications deriving from multiple cultural, experiential, and spiritual “sources.”

(⁹) Indeed, “this fulfilling of function in devotion to the interests of the social organism, is not to be put into a man from without. It must begin in the man himself, however much the good and the wise of society contribute. Personal responsibility, individual initiation, these are the notes of democracy” (Dewey, 1888, EW 1: 244).

(¹⁰) Putnam and Putnam (1993, 368) note that “Dewey’s picture of human nature is Darwinian and naturalistic, but not reductionist. [. . .] One aspect of Dewey’s anti-reductionism is an insistence that the distinction between needs and mere desires, and likewise the distinction between ‘values’ (which have been intelligently appraised in the course of experience) and mere satisfactions is essential to understanding human action. This does not mean that ethics is a ‘special science,’ the science that seeks to appraise satisfactions in order to discover what is *valuable*; rather, for Dewey, *every* inquiry tests values as well as facts.”

(¹¹) An account of this vision, which has significant epistemological and ethical implications, is again clearly visible in *Ethics*, where he acknowledges the “stimulus to foresight, to scientific discovery, and practical invention, which has proceeded from interest in the helpless, the weak, the sick, the disabled, blind, deaf, and insane” and from a “coldly scientific view” highlights the gains that can be reached “through the growth of social pity, of care for the unfortunate” in terms of social growth (Dewey, 1908, MW 5:335).

(¹²) These scholars shared, according to Miller (1999, 4), “an organic conception of society,” which was “viewed as an organism in which the flourishing of each element requires the cooperation of all the others”; accordingly, the aim of social justice is to

Dewey, the Ethics of Democracy, and the Challenge of Social Inclusion in Education

“specify the institutional arrangements that will allow each person to contribute fully to social well being.”

(¹³) According to Rockefeller, in his effort to facilitate the development of industrial democracy, which has been from different perspectives and at different times criticized as impractical and utopian, Dewey tries “to break down the long standing western dualisms between the spiritual and the material, the ideal and the natural, and means and ends” that “have the effect of degrading the material or natural by stripping it of inherent moral and spiritual meaning” with a “dehumanizing and dispiriting effect on the life of the mass of people whose lives are largely bound up with material and industrial concerns.” On these bases “industrial democracy means realizing the inherent meaning and value of industrial work and reconstructing the industrial sphere” (Rockefeller, 1989, 308).

(¹⁴) As Paul Kurtz writes in the introduction to the fifth volume of the Later Works, Dewey “sought to work out a new definition of liberalism, emphasizing that liberalism should not be identified with a particular party platform or program but rather with a method of intelligence to be used in a democracy to solve social problems” (Kurtz, in LW 5: xvii).

(¹⁵) That’s why “more numerous and more varied points of contact denote a greater diversity of stimuli to which an individual has to respond; they consequently put a premium on variation in his action. They secure a liberation of powers which remain suppressed as long as the incitations to action are partial, as they must be in a group which in its exclusiveness shuts out many interests” (Dewey, 1916, MW 9:93).

(¹⁶) As Campbell (1984, 373) points out, in a Deweyan perspective social reconstruction has to be carried on through a “method” that has two levels, each one with a different focus: “the first is largely intellectual and the second is largely practical.” “The first level is that in which the problem is formulated and possible solutions are brought forth; the second, that in which the community evaluates these possibilities and enacts the chosen solution.”

Maura Striano

Department of Humanistic Studies, University of Naples Federico II

