Introduction: Retrieving a ‘Global’ American Philosopher

There are two requests I should like to make to readers of the volume, not to forestall criticism but that it may be rendered, perhaps, more pertinent. Three lectures do not permit one to say all he thinks, nor even all that he believes that he knows. Omission of topics and themes does not, accordingly, signify that I should have passed them by in a more extended treatment. I particularly regret the enforced omission of reference to the relation of liberalism to international affairs. I should also like to remind readers that not everything can be said in the same breath and that it is necessary to stress first one aspect and then another of the general subject. So I hope that what is said will be taken as a whole and also in comparison and contrast with alternative methods of social action. (LW11: 4)¹

It might seem rather bizarre to claim that a return to the work of John Dewey can offer a greater appreciation of globalization and global democracy at the start of the twenty-first century. Dewey appears to be a creature of a wholly different epoch; born in 1859, the year Darwin published *Origin of the Species* and just short of eighteen months before the Battle of Fort Sumter, Dewey’s life would end only some six years after the beginning of the ‘Cold War’. To read his body of work is therefore to enter a world that does not include bearing witness to some of the most momentous events of American and world history in the twentieth century. This includes the success of the American Civil Rights Movement, the Vietnam War and the winds of change that flattened European imperialism and empire. This is to say nothing of events such as the rise and fall of the Bretton Woods regime, the hegemonic ascent of neo-liberalism, the end of the Cold War and the
rise of communications technology such as the Internet. Dewey’s world thus appears to be alien to contemporary concerns about rampant globalization and the need to move democracy beyond the confines of the nation state to regulate a runaway world.

Indeed, one might also label the attempt to call Dewey a ‘global’ thinker pure and utter philosophical folly in the first place. After all, there doesn’t seem to be, philosophically at least, anything more quintessentially American than Dewey and his brand of philosophical pragmatism. This view is common amongst various critical interpreters of Dewey’s work, who saw pragmatism as a foil for American capitalism (Westbrook 2005: 139–41). Famously, Bertrand Russell (1909) labelled the work of Dewey and his fellow philosophical pragmatists, such as William James and Charles Sanders Pierce, as little more than the philosophical accomplice to American corporate capitalism. This viewpoint was repeated by Lewis Mumford (1926: 77) in the 1920s, who charged Dewey and his fellow pragmatists with a form of philosophical ‘acquiescence’, which propounded an uncritical body of philosophy that was ‘permeated by the smell of the Gilded Age’. Whilst Martin Heidegger (1977: 153) would label philosophical pragmatism as the ‘American interpretation of Americanism’, a philosophy that simply replicated American capitalism’s ‘technological frenzy’ and constant ‘reorganization of man’.

In the light of these statements, an uninformed reader would seemingly be quite justified in believing Dewey to be a ‘local’ American philosopher, whose work is unable to offer us in the present any insight about ‘global’ issues. On one hand, one cannot deny that Dewey was a local philosopher whose accent was unmistakably American. In writing back to Mumford, for instance, Dewey argued that pragmatism was not the expression of American industrialism but rather the re-articulation of American values that were now opposed to those ‘most in evidence’ in the Gilded Age (LW3: 127). These were the values of a ‘radical democratic tradition’ that could be traced back to the history of the United States of America and the words and creeds of Lincoln, Jefferson and Emerson (Bernstein 2010: 88). From these democratic
foundations, Dewey came to a profound understanding that democracy was fragile and needed to be rejuvenated and reinterpreted to live up to its ideal of a ‘democratic way of life’. Dewey’s philosophical oeuvre, and in particular his political philosophy in works such as *The Public and Its Problems* (LW2) and *Liberalism and Social Action* (LW11), therefore often looked to pit ‘America against itself’ so that the country could achieve the democratic hopes and dreams that were the foundation of its independence (Westbrook 2005: 140). In this vein, Dewey’s philosophy can be seen as an earlier incarnation of the democratic spirit that Richard Rorty (1999) evoked when he sought to show how intellectual labour could help American citizens to ‘achieve our country’.

On the other hand, however, Dewey was not just concerned with American democracy but rather American democracy in a global context. From the conquest and founding of the North American continent by the Europeans, or the importation of chattel slaves from Africa, to its war of independence right through to the nascent industrial world Dewey would be born into, America had always been a country animated and related to global flows of people, technology and politics. The American Civil War (1861–65) in which Dewey grew up in was fought just as much as a result of the diametrically opposed views on international trade policy between Southern and Northern states as it was fought over the immorality of chattel slavery. At the end of his life, Dewey would see the global ramifications of the atomic bomb and the emergence of the Truman Doctrine that effectively committed the United States to a global struggle against the Soviet Union and her allies. In between Dewey visited or taught in Europe, China, Turkey, Mexico, the USSR, and aged seventy-eight, he departed in 1937 for Mexico to chair an international committee created to inquire into the charges made by the Soviet state against Leon Trotsky (Cochran 2010: 310). When one adds to this that Dewey lived through the Spanish-American War, the First World War, the rise of communism and fascism, the Great Depression and (the *fait accompli* that was) the Second World War, it is clear that Dewey was an American inhabitant of a global world.
Whilst Dewey’s political philosophy was thus a creature of late nineteenth century and early twentieth-century America, it was more importantly about America in a globalized and interdependent world, or rather what Dewey called ‘The Great Society’. Indeed, as the preface to *Liberalism and Social Action* cited earlier makes clear, even when Dewey could not find the room to talk about the global context in his philosophy it was never too far from his mind. This dual aspect of Dewey’s life and his work, where he was an American living in a global world, appears to have been lost in translation throughout the years. This book aims to show how the retrieval of the ‘global’ John Dewey not only highlights that it was the global context of American democracy that forced Dewey’s political philosophy into the task of ‘restoring the spirit of America and its origin and propelling it, revised and renewed, into the future’ (Martin 2002: 397–8). But that the global context also led Dewey to become a fully fledged global democrat, who sought to revise and renew American democracy along and within global dimensions. The overall aim of this book is to show how the fruits of Dewey’s attempts to reconstruct democracy, both at home and abroad, in the first half of the twentieth century provide rich food for thought about our twenty-first-century attempts to rethink democracy in the age of globalization.2

The enigma of democratic globalization

The obvious question that arises out of the claim that we need to recover a ‘global’ Dewey is why do we need such retrieval in the first place? The answer revolves around the relationship between globalization and democracy. The fate of democracy in the age of globalization, especially globalization under the auspices of neo-liberalism, has preoccupied scholars across the social sciences since the fall of the Berlin Wall (Fine 2007; Calhoun 2008). This preoccupation has revolved around the argument that globalization demands that we become post-Westphalian in ‘a deep ontological sense’ and let go ‘not only of the
idea of the sovereign state, but also of the individualistic basis for the establishment of sovereign authority formalised by Thomas Hobbes at the same time as the Treaty of Westphalia…” (Dryzek 2012: 113–14). Within this narrative, globalization is not to be taken, as it so often is, as a word to be causally thrown around or as some sort of theoretical cushion that appears to mould to the posterior of whoever sits upon it. Rather, propelled by neo-liberal imperatives, modern globalization is said to have unleashed a historically unprecedented form of interconnectedness through intercontinental or interregional forms of trade, production and finance that have fundamentally altered the status of the nation state and national democracy (Held 2010: 28–9).³

The primary effect of neo-liberal globalization is that ‘modern sovereignty’, where autonomous nation states exercise unquestionable authority within bounded political communities and resolve their differences with one another through reason of state and diplomacy, is said to have collapsed (Held and McGrew 2007: 211). This is because neo-liberal globalization has encouraged the deterritorialization of political authority and sovereignty away from the nation state and the subsequent reterritorialization of such power beyond the nation state. This now not only makes the nation state largely subservient to the tenets of free-market economics but also establishes the authority of global governance institutions (IMF, WTO, World Bank) and global markets over the nation state (Hardt and Negri 1999; Habermas 2001).

The ramifications of neo-liberal globalization and the supposed collapse of modern sovereignty for the legitimacy and power of national democracy are stark. If we take democracy to be the sign of a legitimate order and define its normative meaning as all affected persons being included, either directly or through their representatives, in the deliberation and formation of decisions and legislation which shape their common circumstance and destinies, then it becomes clear that globalization’s creation of global interconnectedness and the decline of modern sovereignty render nation states incapable of securing democratic accountability for their citizens. The embrace of a post-Westphalian ontology and very normative strictures of democracy
therefore demands the extension of ‘…political decision making capabilities beyond national borders…’ (Habermas 2012: 15) at the same time as the scope of decisions within them is also being undercut.

Those who embrace such a post-Westphalian ontology include a variety of scholars who are not necessarily happy bedfellows. However, they are united by the belief that statist solutions, where global democracy is envisaged to centre on multilateral collaboration between democratic nation states, are unable to achieve global democracy. This includes modern statist positions, which argue that democracy beyond the state is secure when democracy within the state is secure. Whilst post-Westphalian ideas of global democracy see the state and its democracy as having provided key pivots for global democracy, such as forming the UN system, their belief is that such a system is still a deficient and flawed medium to achieve global democracy in present circumstances. This centres on the internal political and economic stratification within states, the transnational nature of global interconnectedness, the inability of national leaders to further global democracy beyond national interests and the continuing hegemony of rich and powerful nations at the international level. Whilst the state should play a part in global democracy, post-Westphalian positions believe that global democracy cannot begin and end with the state and interstate relations (Scholte 2012: 4–6).

Following Cochran (2002), we can divide these post-Westphalian positions on global democracy very roughly into those who favour ‘top-down’ pathways to global democracy and those who favour ‘bottom-up’ pathways. Top-down pathways can be seen as revolving around the idea of modern cosmopolitanism. Premised upon the theoretical foundations provided by Kant and the work of twentieth-century world federalists, modern cosmopolitanism purports that the world should be taken as a unit of society that has political rights and obligations transcending its nation state-based counterparts (Brown and Held 2010). This has seen a plethora of work arguing for the supplementing and transcending of elements of liberal democracy’s national framework to regional and/or global dimensions (Held 1995,
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2004; Habermas, 2006; Archibugi 2008; Hale et al., 2013). This would see nation states pool sovereignty through submitting their national interests to regional (EU) and global governance (UN) institutions, and the extending of liberal democracy’s national framework of citizenship rights, civil society (Kaldor 2003), the public sphere (Bohman 2007) and elements of political democracy, such as parliaments and political parties (Patomäki 2011), from national to regional or global levels.

Modern cosmopolitanism has come under criticism for privileging the roles of elites and a form of spatial globalism that revolves around global institutions and organizations without examining how global democracy is linked to local, national and regional democracy (Smith and Brassett 2008; Calhoun 2010). At the same time, modern cosmopolitanism is also accused of a failure to tackle the global economic inequalities that are created and perpetuated by neo-liberal globalization (Hardt and Negri 2004) and of universalizing Eurocentric ideas of citizenship, sovereignty, human rights and democracy without any transcultural dialogue with non-Western epistemologies (Rao 2010; Bhambra 2011; Hobson 2012).

To circumvent the failings of modern cosmopolitanism, a wide range of authors have attempted to reimagine global democracy from below and have argued for bottom-up strategies for achieving global democracy. These include conceiving spaces such as global civil society (Brassett and Smith 2010), the international public sphere (Dryzek 2006, 2010) and the World Social Forum (Sen and Escobar 2007) as arenas that retain their independence from governance institutions and provide a platform for social movements, activists and citizens to communicate and politically organize on a global level. More radical positions look to social movements such as the Zapatistas, anti-globalization and Occupy Movement not only to transcend the spatial globalism and Eurocentrism of modern cosmopolitanism but also to displace global capitalist relations in the formation of a new and novel form of global democracy (Hardt and Negri 1999, 2004, 2011).

Post-Westphalian global democracy is not without its own critics, however. As Scholte (2012: 10) points out, some see global democracy
as an ‘oxymoron’ because democracy beyond the space of the local or national container becomes impossible to manage or implement (Dhal 1999, 2001). This has led to the argument that the way to secure greater global democracy is to actually ‘deglobalize’ the global economy and allow nations to assert their sovereignty in economic and political matters (Bello 2005, 2013). The debate surrounding post-Westphalian ideas of global democracy can therefore be seen as a site of competing and unresolved dualisms. On one hand, there is a dualism between statist and post-Westphalian ideas of global democracy. On the other hand, within ideas of post-Westphalian democracy there is also a dualism between top-down and bottom-up approaches to global democracy.

These unresolved dualisms, which plague ideas of global democracy, are not mere theoretical abstractions. Behind them resides a current world order governed by neo-liberal globalization and insufficient democratic control. Neo-liberal imperatives, which identify private markets and free economic enterprise as meeting human needs and freedom vis-à-vis largely inefficient state intervention and regulation, have increased systemic inequality within and between states and regions of the world. Moreover, forms of global governance are both undemocratic and unable to govern globalization democratically (Chang 2007; Wade 2009a, 2009b; Rodrik 2011). The result of failing to increase democratic control over neo-liberal globalization could not be bleaker. At the dawn of the twenty-first century, there are very few theoretical debates that have such potential practical permutations and relevancy than the theoretical debate about the best way to secure global democracy. Indeed, the debate about global democracy would appear to centre on nothing short of the survival or extinction of the human race:

Unresolved global challenges such as nuclear proliferation, global inequality, global infectious diseases, environmental degradation, and financial crises not only risk affecting the life chances of men, women, and children across the world in the future, but do so now in numerous ways. At the core of daily human insecurity, as well as uncertainty
created by risks ranging from new forms of terrorism to nuclear war or accelerating climate change, lie fundamental issues of survival, freedom, the rule of law, and social justice. (Hale et al. 2013: 311)

**Back to the future**

It might seem counter-intuitive to attempt to interpret how we can democratize neo-liberal globalization through the work of a philosopher who died midway through the twentieth century. However, through returning to and recovering the neglected global dimensions of John Dewey’s political philosophy and international writings, this book will aim to highlight the ‘global’ Dewey. I argue that his insights about globalization and democracy can contribute towards present theoretical debates about globalization and global democracy. Moreover, John Dewey’s work from the end of the First World War onwards prefigures an approach to global democracy that not only dispels the dualisms that plague modern ideas of global democracy but also has important points to make about the role of national democracy in the expansion of democracy beyond the confines of the nation state.

The book discloses the ‘global Dewey’ through examining how his works – especially *The Public and Its Problems* (LW2) – set out an evolutionary form of global and national democracy in response to a rapidly globalizing economy. The global dimensions of Dewey’s thought have received relatively little study and although they are underappreciated they provide valuable lessons for those of us in the twenty-first century who hold out hopes for global democracy. These lessons centre on how Dewey’s work illuminates the following:

- The problem of globalization and democracy is rooted in the emergence of the First Great Globalization of the nineteenth century.
- The rise of globalization and increased industrial complexity does not necessarily create reflexive and cosmopolitan individuals.
• Nationalism and national democracy are not the archenemies of planetary democracy.
• The fate of extending democracy beyond the nation state is twined with the fate of democracy at the national level, and the nation state is the starting point for any form of planetary democracy.
• Liberal capitalism and democracy are, to a large extent, incompatible with one another.

Above all, the book will conclude that Deweyan lessons highlight that what we often take to be the problems of ‘globalization’, the collapse of ‘modern sovereignty’ and ‘global democracy’ are simply new ways of expressing old concerns and debates. Those of us in the present would therefore be well served by returning to Dewey’s reflections on these old concerns as a source of new insights into our own present of globalization and its deadly discontents.

Outline of the book

The book consists of five chapters. Chapters 1 and 2 highlight how Dewey’s defence of democracy in the context of what he denotes as the Great Society leads him to confront the problems of globalization and global democracy. Chapter 1 thus returns to Dewey’s 1927 text *The Public and Its Problems* and fleshes out how his conception of ‘creative democracy’ defines democracy as an evolutionary ideal whose institutions change and adapt to the demands of the environment. This entails re-examining Dewey’s debate with Walter Lippmann and democratic realism about the nature of the state, publics, expertise and the value of democracy and outlining his subsequent argument that publics, government and consequently the state are historically relative properties. This is followed by an examination of Dewey’s argument that democracy is the best way to deal with such historical relativity due its ability to efficiently update the institutions of government without unnecessary recourse to violent revolution or the suppression
of others. The chapter ends by outlining how Dewey believed the ideal of ‘creative democracy’ conjoined the ideal of democracy (what he called ‘democracy as a way of life’) with a practical agenda of reforming and renewing what he saw as the institutions and practices of ‘political democracy’.

Chapter 2 explores how Dewey’s conception of creative democracy had global connotations. This entails recovering how Dewey’s political philosophy of publics and democracy was forged with globalization and the extension of democracy beyond the nation state in mind. This is achieved by firstly contextualizing Dewey’s work from the 1920s onwards and its evocation of the emergence of ‘The Great Society’ as being a reaction to the First Great Globalization, which had taken place in the nineteenth century and continued through the early parts of the twentieth century. The chapter continues by examining how Dewey’s texts from *The Public and Its Problems* onwards called for the creation of a global Great Community and global democracy to regulate the global dimensions of the Great Society. The chapter concludes by highlighting how Dewey believed that global democracy was a realizable endeavour and outlines some of his recommendations for how it should be practised through the empowerment of publics and global institutions.

Chapter 3 will examine how Dewey problematized his own conception of democracy through arguing that the public within modern nation states was ‘eclipsed’ under the regime he called ‘bourgeois democracy’. In this scenario, citizen publics were unable to map the forces affecting their lives and disenchanted with a political democracy that had been captured by the interests of capital. It has become the norm to read Dewey’s account of the eclipse of the public and the stunting of creative democracy as simply being concerned with the American nation state. However, the chapter will conclude by demonstrating that Dewey’s claim that the Great Society had no ‘political agencies worthy of it’ extended to matters of global democracy and that he twined the fate of democracy beyond the nation state to democracy within the nation state.

Chapter 4 shifts the terrain of Dewey’s global focus to ideas of global justice and equality. This chapter demonstrates that Dewey’s
idea of global democracy was linked with an idea of global equality, which would secure social intelligence on a global scale. The logical result of this argument is a radical conception of global justice and the need for economic equality within and beyond nations. This revolves around examining how Dewey’s idea of creative democracy was based upon a form of deliberation he called social intelligence and how social intelligence is essentially an adoption of the ‘scientific attitude of the mind’ into moral and political matters. It will be argued that Dewey did not believe that liberal capitalism’s culture and political economy could support the conditions of equality, which would make creative democracy through social intelligence possible. Dewey’s politics of democratic socialism subsequently reveals his views on the relationship between economic and political equality within the Great Society. The final section highlights how Dewey’s views on economic and political equality translate into an argument for the extension of a global egalitarianism, which would allow all nations of the world to pursue the democratic way of life.

To conclude the study, Chapter 5 turns to outlining what I believe are the four main lessons Dewey provides about global democracy. All four of these lessons foresee the contemporary obstacles faced in moving democracy beyond the nation state and, importantly, how Dewey realized that democracy abroad was impossible without democracy at home. Moreover, these lessons revolve around what we can denote as Dewey’s rooted cosmopolitanism, which argues that without a thriving democracy within the nation state there can be very little chance of democracy beyond the nation state. The chapter concludes by arguing that Dewey’s work on the problems of bourgeois democracy at home and abroad highlights significant gaps in post-Westphalian conceptions of global democracy. This will reveal that the nature, political efficacy or viability, of any conception of ‘global democracy’ in the twenty-first century can only be adequately conceptualized by revisiting and confronting Deweyan concerns about the political efficacy or viability of publics and their relation to democratic praxis within the nation state.
A ventriloquist’s disclaimer

Before I start my exposition of John Dewey as a global philosopher, a quick note about intellectual interpretation must be made. Robert Westbrook (2005: 177), perhaps John Dewey’s key intellectual biographer, makes a pertinent point about intellectual history when he states that intellectual historians bear a responsibility to read philosophers accurately in order to illuminate how these figures can provide useful guidance on our present problems. In the act of ventriloquism that is intellectual history we therefore bear the responsibility of making our philosophical puppet utter words it would have uttered if he or she were actually alive or present in the room. This is less about a rigid conception of objective truth, argues Westbrook, but rather a rough and ready rule to stop us imagining intellectual playmates who may never have existed in the first place. In this book, I try to follow Westbrook’s advice as much as I can, but I do bend Westbrook’s rule for intellectual historians slightly, not by elucidating an argument Dewey would never have made, but by outlining an argument Dewey did not outline in one systematic statement but one he could have made in a systematic way if had chosen to. Dewey did not make a great systematic statement on global democracy but a philosophy of global democracy is scattered throughout his body of work. Indeed, Dewey’s lack of a book on global democracy seems more due to a lack of time and the fact that he was busy writing as a concerned American citizen in a global world. However, as we shall see, this makes perfect sense when you understand Dewey’s belief in the fact that democracy at home was fundamentally linked to democracy abroad.