

Conclusion: Inheriting the Task of Creative Democracy

At all events this is what I mean when I say that we now have to re-create by deliberate and determined endeavour the kind of democracy which in its origin one hundred and fifty years ago was largely the product of a fortunate combination of men and circumstances. We have lived for a long time upon that heritage that came to us from the happy conjunction of men and events in an earlier day. The present state of the world is more than a reminder that we have now to put forth every energy of our own to prove worthy of our heritage. It is a challenge to do for the critical and complex conditions of today what the men of an earlier day did for simpler conditions. (LW14: 225)

The use of historical analogy is always a curious endeavour, as no matter how similar such history is to the present day, the reality is that history, by its very definition, can never be a true reflection of the present. However, maybe the focus on reflection and symmetry is itself a false endeavour and the use of history is best seen as providing extra colour to the spectrum through which we view the present. Just like the death of a dying star light-years away, then, the actual unfolding of events and the lessons to be learnt from the past can only be truly seen long after those events have actually taken place. The life and work of John Dewey would seem to fit this characterization of history. From within our present, Dewey's work, which at its latest point is still over sixty years old, seems to now offer fresh ways of seeing and approaching our contemporary conundrum of managing globalization along democratic lines.

The overriding point of Dewey's work on democracy was that democracy as a way of life, just as other forms of life, was not

something that could stand still. The democratic way of life must always move towards meeting those challenges that are present and those that will undoubtedly arise as the conditions of life change (LW13: 299). The democratic ideal therefore always needs updating and unpacking. If democracy were to stand still, it would surrender to circumstance and start on the 'backward road that leads to extinction' (LW11: 182). It was this viewpoint that led Dewey towards becoming a 'global' philosopher and global democrat. This was because Dewey understood that the Great Society and the globalization and scientific revolutions that underpinned it both demanded and offered potential avenues to renew and refresh democracy as a way of life across and between nation states. This held the potential of helping humanity not only move forwards and away from extinction but also move towards a more enhanced and enriched shared existence. This was the dual promise Dewey saw in creative democracy and social intelligence within a global Great Community.

In many ways, this narration of Dewey as a global democrat replicates the contemporary call for the innovation of democracy beyond the state. However, Dewey's work also illuminates the blind spot of our contemporary problematizations of globalization and democracy. This centres on Dewey's idea that democracy is not only simply about governments, states and institutions but a form of life for all of us. It is the spread of democratic habits and dispositions across and between communities that offers us the best chance of renewing and refreshing the democratic ideal in the midst of changing conditions:

... democracy is a *personal* way of individual life; that it signifies the possession and continual use of certain attitudes, forming personal character and determining desire and purpose in all the relations of life. Instead of thinking of our own disposition and habits as accommodated to certain institutions we have to learn to think of the latter as expressions, projections and extensions of habitually dominant personal attitudes. Democracy as a personal, an individual, way of life involves nothing fundamentally new. But when applied it puts a new practical meaning in old ideas. (LW14: 226)

These words taken from his eightieth birthday address mark out both Dewey's great contribution and challenge as a global philosopher. As this book has tried to show, Dewey's contribution as a global philosopher centres on the theorization of the link between democracy at home and democracy abroad. The formation of the democratic community at the international level is inherently dependant upon the vitality of the community and the diffusion of democratic habits at the national and local level. The possibility of democratic community at the international level is therefore inherently dependant upon the health and status of the democratic community at home. This in turn always takes us back to Dewey's identification of the problem of bourgeois democracy both at home and abroad as the biggest obstacle towards the emergence of creative democracy at home and abroad – a situation that seemingly speaks directly to the social, economic and political contours of our neo-liberal present.

Yet, if Dewey's work brings into analytical focus how the problem of democracy abroad is linked to the problem of bourgeois democracy at home, then his work also challenges us to renew and refresh democracy as a way of life in such circumstances. This is the idea that our democratic inheritance is not static but that:

... every generation has to accomplish democracy over again for itself; that its very nature, its essence, is something that cannot be handed on from one person or one generation to another, but has to be worked in terms of needs, problems and conditions of the social life of which, as years go by, we are a part, a social life that is changing with extreme rapidity from year to year. (LW13: 299)

The creative task facing us today very much resembles Dewey's time, in that we need to reformulate democracy in order to cope with the contours of a globalized world. Yes, some of the details may be different. However, when turning to modern issues that demand global democracy, such as climate change and global inequality, it becomes clear that the creative task facing us today is very much the same task that faced Dewey: the eradication of capital's hegemonic control over democratic government and dispelling the political apathy such a state

of affairs casts over the masses. Our problem, just like Dewey's, is how to help reorganize the public towards the democratic way of life and the practice of creative democracy. This requires that we recognize that democracy abroad is only possible with democracy at home and that we re-establish what Dewey called the 'fighting faith' of democratic politics. These challenges mark the continuity between Dewey's Great Society and our own present of neo-liberal globalization and also the continuing relevance of Dewey's warning that the failure to meet such a challenge would place humanity further along the road to extinction. For humanity to survive, we must therefore use our democratic inheritance to help us succeed in what Dewey (LW13: 303) called the 'experiment in which we are all engaged, whether we want to be or not, the greatest experiment of humanity', that of living together in ways in which life is profitable in the deepest sense of the word, not just for some, but for all of humanity and the world we inhabit.