

The Public and Its Problems

John Dewey

新闻学与传播学经典丛书·英文原版系列

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John Dewey 著
[美]约翰·杜威

中国传媒大学出版社

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出版说明

“新闻学与传播学经典丛书·英文原版系列”，选取了在新闻学与传播学历史上具有里程碑意义的大师经典名作，如传播学“四大奠基人”哈罗德·拉斯韦尔、保罗·拉扎斯菲尔德等，及加布里埃尔·塔尔德、罗伯特·帕克、哈罗德·伊尼斯、马歇尔·麦克卢汉、库尔特·卢因、卡尔·霍夫兰等这些学界耳熟能详的名家佳作。这些是传播学与新闻学的奠基之作，也是现代新闻学与传播学发展的基础。许多名作都多次再版，影响深远，历久不衰，成为新闻学与传播学的经典。此套丛书采用英文原版出版，希望读者能读到原汁原味的著作。

随着中国高等教育的教学改革，广大师生已不满足于仅仅阅读国外图书的翻译版，他们迫切希望能读到原版图书，希望能采用国外英文原版图书进行教学，从而保证所讲授的知识体系的完整性、系统性、科学性和文字描绘的准确性。此套丛书的出版便是满足了这种需求，同时可使学生在专业技术方面尽快掌握本学科相应的外语词汇，并了解先进国家的学术发展方向。

本系列在引进英文原版图书的同时，将目录译为中文，作为对原版的一种导读，供读者阅读时参考。

从事经典著作的出版，需要出版人付出不懈的努力，我们自知本套丛书也许会有很多缺陷，虚心接受读者提出的批评和建议。

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FOREWORD

This volume is the result of lectures delivered during the month of January, nineteen hundred and twenty-six, upon the Larwill Foundation of Kenyon College, Ohio. In acknowledging the many courtesies received, I wish to express also my appreciation of the toleration shown by the authorities of the College to delay in publication. The intervening period has permitted a full revision and expansion of the lectures as originally delivered. This fact will account for an occasional reference to books published in the interval.

J. D.

**THE PUBLIC
AND ITS PROBLEMS**

CHAPTER I

SEARCH FOR THE PUBLIC

If one wishes to realize the distance which may lie between "facts" and the meaning of facts, let one go to the field of social discussion. Many persons seem to suppose that facts carry their meaning along with themselves on their face. Accumulate enough of them, and their interpretation stares out at you. The development of physical science is thought to confirm the idea. But the power of physical facts to coerce belief does not reside in the bare phenomena. It proceeds from method, from the technique of research and calculation. No one is ever forced by just the collection of facts to accept a particular theory of their meaning, so long as one retains intact some other doctrine by which he can marshal them. Only when the facts are allowed free play for the suggestion of new points of view is any significant conversion of conviction as to meaning possible. Take away from physical science its laboratory apparatus and its mathematical technique, and the human imagination might run wild in its theories of interpretation even if we suppose the brute facts to remain the same.

In any event, social philosophy exhibits an immense gap between facts and doctrines. Compare, for ex-

ample, the facts of politics with the theories which are extant regarding the nature of the state. If inquirers confine themselves to observed phenomena, the behavior of kings, presidents, legislators, judges, sheriffs, assessors and all other public officials, surely a reasonable consensus is not difficult to attain. Contrast with this agreement the differences which exist as to the basis, nature, functions and justification of the state, and note the seemingly hopeless disagreement. If one asks not for an enumeration of facts, but for a definition of the state, one is plunged into controversy, into a medley of contradictory clamors. According to one tradition, which claims to derive from Aristotle, the state is associated and harmonized life lifted to its highest potency; the state is at once the keystone of the social arch and is the arch in its wholeness. According to another view, it is just one of many social institutions, having a narrow but important function, that of arbiter in the conflict of other social units. Every group springs out of and realizes a positive human interest; the church, religious values; guilds, unions and corporations material economic interests, and so on. The state, however, has no concern of its own; its purpose is formal, like that of the leader of the orchestra who plays no instrument and makes no music, but who serves to keep other players who do produce music in unison with one another. Still a third view has it that the state is organized oppression, at once a social excrescence, a

parasite and a tyrant. A fourth is that it is an instrument more or less clumsy for keeping individuals from quarreling too much with one another.

Confusion grows when we enter subdivisions of these different views and the grounds offered for them. In one philosophy, the state is the apex and completion of human association, and manifests the highest realization of all distinctively human capacities. The view had a certain pertinency when it was first formulated. It developed in an antique city-state, where to be fully a free man and to be a citizen participating in the drama, the sports, the religion and the government of the community were equivalent affairs. But the view persists and is applied to the state of to-day. Another view coördinates the state with the church (or as a variant view slightly subordinates it to the latter) as the secular arm of Deity maintaining outward order and decorum among men. A modern theory idealizes the state and its activities by borrowing the conceptions of reason and will, magnifying them till the state appears as the objectified manifestation of a will and reason which far transcend the desires and purposes which can be found among individuals or assemblages of individuals.

We are not concerned, however, with writing either a cyclopedia or history of political doctrines. So we pause with these arbitrary illustrations of the proposition that little common ground has been discovered between the factual phenomena of political behavior

and the interpretation of the meaning of these phenomena. One way out of the impasse is to consign the whole matter of meaning and interpretation to political philosophy as distinguished from political science. Then it can be pointed out that futile speculation is a companion of all philosophy. The moral is to drop all doctrines of this kind overboard, and stick to facts verifiably ascertained.

The remedy urged is simple and attractive. But it is not possible to employ it. Political facts are not outside human desire and judgment. Change men's estimate of the *value* of existing political agencies and forms, and the latter change more or less. The different theories which mark political philosophy do not grow up externally to the facts which they aim to interpret; they are amplifications of selected factors among those facts. Modifiable and altering human habits sustain and generate political phenomena. These habits are not wholly informed by reasoned purpose and deliberate choice—far from it—but they are more or less amenable to them. Bodies of men are constantly engaged in attacking and trying to change some political habits, while other bodies of men are actively supporting and justifying them. It is mere pretense, then, to suppose that we can stick by the *de facto*, and not raise at some points the question of *de jure*: the question of by what right, the question of legitimacy. And such a question has a way of growing until it has become a question as to the nature of the state itself.

The alternatives before us are not factually limited science on one hand and uncontrolled speculation on the other. The choice is between blind, unreasoned attack and defense on the one hand, and discriminating criticism employing intelligent method and a conscious criterion on the other.

The prestige of the mathematical and physical sciences is great, and properly so. But the difference between facts which are what they are independent of human desire and endeavor and facts which are to some extent what they are because of human interest and purpose, and which alter with alteration in the latter, cannot be got rid of by any methodology. The more sincerely we appeal to facts, the greater is the importance of the distinction between facts which condition human activity and facts which are conditioned by human activity. In the degree which we ignore this difference, social science becomes pseudo-science. Jeffersonian and Hamiltonian political ideas are not merely theories dwelling in the human mind remote from facts of American political behavior. They are expressions of chosen phases and factors among those facts, but they are also something more: namely, forces which have shaped those facts and which are still contending to shape them in the future this way and that. There is more than a speculative difference between a theory of the state which regards it as an instrument in protecting individuals in the rights they already have, and one which conceives its function to

be the effecting of a more equitable distribution of rights among individuals. For the theories are held and applied by legislators in congress and by judges on the bench and make a difference in the subsequent facts themselves.

I make no doubt that the practical influence of the political philosophies of Aristotle, the Stoics, St. Thomas, Locke, Rousseau, Kant and Hegel has often been exaggerated in comparison with the influence of circumstances. But a due measure of efficacy cannot be denied them on the ground which is sometimes proffered; it cannot be denied on the ground that ideas are without potency. For ideas belong to human beings who have bodies, and there is no separation between the structures and processes of the part of the body that entertains the ideas and the part that performs acts. Brain and muscles work together, and the brains of men are much more important data for social science than are their muscular system and their sense organs.

It is not our intention to engage in a discussion of political philosophies. The concept of the state, like most concepts which are introduced by "The," is both too rigid and too tied up with controversies to be of ready use. It is a concept which can be approached by a flank movement more easily than by a frontal attack. The moment we utter the words "The State" a score of intellectual ghosts rise to obscure our vision. Without our intention and without our notice, the notion of "The State" draws us imperceptibly into a

consideration of the logical relationship of various ideas to one another, and away from facts of human activity. It is better, if possible, to start from the latter and see if we are not led thereby into an idea of something which will turn out to implicate the marks and signs which characterize political behavior.

There is nothing novel in this method of approach. But very much depends upon what we select from which to start and very much depends upon whether we select our point of departure in order to tell at the terminus what the state *ought* to be or what it *is*. If we are too concerned with the former, there is a likelihood that we shall unwittingly have doctored the facts selected in order to come out at a predetermined point. The phase of human action we should *not* start with is that to which direct causative power is attributed. We should not look for state-forming forces. If we do, we are likely to get involved in mythology. To explain the origin of the state by saying that man is a political animal is to travel in a verbal circle. It is like attributing religion to a religious instinct, the family to marital and parental affection, and language to a natural endowment which impels men to speech. Such theories merely reduplicate in a so-called causal force the effects to be accounted for. They are of a piece with the notorious potency of opium to put men to sleep because of its dormitive power.

The warning is not directed against a man of straw. The attempt to derive the state, or any other social

institution, from strictly "psychological" data is in point. Appeal to a gregarious instinct to account for social arrangements is the outstanding example of the lazy fallacy. Men do not run together and join in a larger mass as do drops of quicksilver, and if they did the result would not be a state nor any mode of human association. The instincts, whether named gregariousness, or sympathy, or the sense of mutual dependence, or domination on one side and abasement and subjection on the other, at best account for everything in general and nothing in particular. And at worst, the alleged instinct and natural endowment appealed to as a causal force themselves represent physiological tendencies which have previously been shaped into habits of action and expectation by means of the very social conditions they are supposed to explain. Men who have lived in herds develop attachment to the horde to which they have become used; children who have perforce lived in dependence grow into habits of dependence and subjection. The inferiority complex is socially acquired, and the "instinct" of display and mastery is but its other face. There are structural organs which physiologically manifest themselves in vocalizations as the organs of a bird induce song. But the barking of dogs and the song of birds are enough to prove that these native tendencies do not generate language. In order to be converted into language, native vocalization requires transformation by extrinsic conditions, both organic and extra-organic or