

# THE DEMOCRATIC PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION

COMPANION TO DEWEY'S  
DEMOCRACY AND EDUCATION

EXPOSITION AND COMMENT

BY

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## PREFACE

The two following letters furnish the background for the composition of this text and suggest its character. The author joins his readers in expressing appreciation of Dr. Dewey's characteristic magnanimity in this matter. He was in Europe at the time the first letter was sent.

NEW YORK UNIVERSITY  
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION  
Washington Square East  
New York City  
June 18, 1929

Professor John Dewey,  
Columbia University,  
New York City.

My dear Dr. Dewey:

Since the appearance of your *Democracy and Education* it has been one of my required texts in our work in the Philosophy of Education in the School of Education of New York University. As a result of a number of years' experience in using this text two impressions have been formed concerning it. These impressions are the result of the students' viewpoint particularly.

The first is that an expository analysis of the main points in the argument is very welcome to the average student. The second is that a contrasting point of view, showing a different type of philosophy from your own, is likewise a stimulus to students in formulating their own viewpoint.

So, for some time the project has been in mind of writing something like a companion volume to your *Democracy and Education* including the two points of exposition and comment. May I inquire whether it would be agreeable to you to have such a volume written? The last chapter in my revised *Philosophy of Education*, contrasting the pragmatic with the idealistic points of view, is an indication in brief of what such a treatment would be like.

May I add that Dr. C. C. Van Liew of the Macmillan Company has been apprised of my thought in the matter and is favorably disposed to the idea, in case you are. And if the idea is approvable by you,

may I ask whether you would prefer some different publisher than the Macmillan Company? Their attitude is quite generous in the matter.

May I say in a personal way that the exposition given in my *Philosophy of Education* of the pragmatic views has not been criticized as being in any way unfair or unjust to those views.

It is also a part of my plan to have the volume introduced with the new picture of the Epstein bust of yourself.

There is no particular occasion for hurry in your reply.

Allow me to join your many friends in extending to you the very best wishes for the continuance of your good health through many years of great usefulness.

Yours very cordially,

HERMAN H. HORNE

Professor of the Philosophy of  
Education

HHH: B

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY<sup>1</sup>  
in the City of New York  
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

August 24, 1929.

Professor Herman H. Horne,  
New York University,  
Washington Square East,  
New York City.

My dear Professor Horne:

I am very sorry to be so late in replying to your interesting letter of last June. I hope you have not been hindered in carrying out your plan by my failure to write.

Such a volume as you have in mind would certainly be welcome to me personally, and I have no doubt will be very useful to the educational public. It seems very fitting that The Macmillan Company should publish the book.

Sincerely yours,

JD: JT

(Signed) JOHN DEWEY

This book has been written in accordance with the foregoing plan. For years we have used Dewey's *Democracy and Education* as one of our texts in the *Philosophy of Education*, because of its importance and influence. Like other readers, our students have found the style difficult. At the same time

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Dewey's reply is published here with his kind permission.

the instructor has had certain views of his own to present that differed notably from those in the text. Consequently a two-fold need has arisen for this work; the first is to understand Dr. Dewey more readily, and the second is to estimate his views more discriminatingly.

Our method is the simple one of following the Dewey text in order and sequence, first with a clarifying exposition, and then with an interpretative and critical comment. In accordance with the review of the argument contained in Chapter XXIV, the contents have been divided into four logical parts, as indicated in the Table of Contents and in the body of the discussion.

Dr. Dewey has exerted a great influence on education both at home and abroad. Dr. Kilpatrick's *Source Book* and Dr. Dewey's *Democracy and Education* are the texts most widely used in our country in the field of educational philosophy.<sup>1</sup> About one-fifth of the former book is drawn from the writings of Dr. Dewey. This situation suggests the significance of Dr. Dewey's educational views at home. Concerning his educational influence abroad, Professor Kandel writes:

Translations have appeared of practically all of his educational writings. One or more have been published in most of the European languages—French, German, Russian, Hungarian, Bulgarian, Greek, Italian, Spanish, and Swedish—and in Arabic, Turkish, Chinese, and Japanese, while special editions of his earlier works have been published in England. The [foreign] literature about Dewey has been slight, but it is noteworthy that of fourteen articles or books on his educational theory the majority are of recent date, although the first goes back to 1901, when an American student wrote for the doctor's degree in a German university a dissertation on Dewey's doctrine of interest.<sup>2</sup>

Concerning his interest in education and his volume before us, Dr. Dewey has himself written:

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Mack, Henry W., "Comparative Content of Educational Philosophy Text Books," *Education*, December, 1928.

<sup>2</sup> Kandel, I. L., "John Dewey's Influence on Education in Foreign Lands," in *John Dewey the Man and His Philosophy*, Cambridge, 1930, p. 71.

While I cannot write an account of [my] intellectual development without giving it the semblance of a continuity that it does not in fact own, there are four special points that seem to stand out. One is the importance that the practice and theory of education have had for me: especially the education of the young, for I have never been able to feel much optimism regarding the possibilities of 'higher' education when it is built upon warped and weak foundations. This interest fused with and brought together what might otherwise have been separate interests—that in psychology and that in social institutions and social life. I can recall but one critic who has suggested that my thinking has been too much permeated by interest in education. Although a book called *Democracy and Education* was for many years that in which my philosophy, such as it is, was most fully expounded, I do not know that philosophic critics, as distinct from teachers, have ever had recourse to it. I have wondered whether such facts signified that philosophers in general, although they are themselves usually teachers, have not taken education with sufficient seriousness for it to occur to them that any rational person could actually think it possible that philosophizing should focus about education as the supreme human interest in which, moreover, other problems, cosmological, moral, logical, come to a head. At all events this handle is offered to any subsequent critic who may wish to lay hold of it.<sup>1</sup>

It is the opinion of the present writer that the work before us contains the seed thoughts of Dr. Dewey that come to flower and fruitage in his later weightier philosophical volumes.

The views of our author are both warmly admired and keenly criticized. An enthusiastic and eulogistic disciple of Dr. Dewey writes of him and of this work as follows:

We think of Professor Dewey as the most profound and understanding thinker on education that the world has yet known. . . . *The Republic of Plato* may well claim to be regarded as the first of secular books. . . . He is the divine Plato whose thoughts are worthy of God, but whose thoughts about God were contributed in the name of the children as teaching material. No wonder Rousseau called

<sup>1</sup> Dewey, John, "From Absolutism to Experimentalism," in Adams, G. P. and Montague, W. P., *Contemporary American Philosophy*, Vol. II, pp. 22-23, The Macmillan Company, 1930.

this the greatest book on education ever written. It was that until John Dewey wrote his *Democracy and Education*.<sup>1</sup>

If Plato is divine and his thoughts worthy of God, and Dewey is greater than Plato, what follows?

At the unveiling of the Epstein bust of Dr. Dewey (see frontispiece), Professor Kilpatrick used this language:

As we look to the ancient days for comparisons I see in Professor Dewey the modest sincerity of Socrates, the radical constructive thinking of Plato, the balanced outlook of Aristotle. . . . These [contributions] and more are so conceived as to constitute the most thoroughgoing grasp yet achieved of how civilization is to be placed on a functional and dynamic basis.<sup>2</sup>

This despite the fact that, though Dr. Dewey has a method, he lacks a plan.

But not all voices join in this chorus. Another writes:

It is from the sociological principles set forth in this chapter and the last that Dewey's *Democracy and Education* is to be appraised. It is based upon and presupposes the sort of philosophy that has just been criticized. Every chapter of Dewey's book expounds the sort of pedagogical theory to which critical reference has just been made. From a dozen points of view he overemphasizes the deliberative, conscious aspect of social life, and in as many ways slurs over the value of habit, drill, and compulsion. The inevitable result is to discount the importance of the social heritage and to pour oil on the already dangerous fire of contemporary individualism. While it is true that the citizens of a democracy need to be taught to think—those of them who have good brains, at least—it is quite as important, especially in the present crisis [1928], that they be taught to revere and obey. It is true that *Democracy and Education* contains some positively constructive theory of very great value, especially the author's exposition of industrial education, which Dewey's followers seem, strangely enough, to have overlooked for the most part. It also contains a valuable half-truth, namely, his emphasis upon constructive thinking. Nevertheless, if the argument of the preceding pages is valid, then it

<sup>1</sup> Moore, E. C., "John Dewey's Contribution to Educational Theory," in *John Dewey the Man and His Philosophy*, Cambridge, 1930, pp. 7, 9-10.

<sup>2</sup> Kilpatrick, W. H., "Remarks at the Unveiling of Dr. Dewey's Bust," *School and Society*, December 22, 1928, pp. 777-778.

follows that that part of Dewey's theory which has gained the most faddish vogue is dangerous, since its emphasis is in the wrong place. At a critical time its influence has increased, rather than checked, the obsessions of the *Zeitgeist*, and the resulting disorders by which the stability of our modern civilization is most deeply and subtly menaced.<sup>1</sup>

It is evident the reader will need to do some study and thinking on his own account, in doing which we will aid him all we can.

Concerning the difficulty of Dr. Dewey's style of writing, two views may be quoted, one of these being from Dr. Dewey himself. In reviewing the volume by Professor Joseph Warren Beach on *The Outlook for American Prose*, Henry Hazlitt<sup>2</sup> writes:

An example of the professor's audacity, and of his penetration as well, is his analysis of the style of John Dewey. Dewey has long been revered as our foremost living thinker, and the obscurity of many of his pages is usually attributed to the subtlety of his thought. Professor Beach examines the matter and finds—and, what is more, proves—that this obscurity is to a very large extent simply the result of bad writing. It is not merely lack of elegance, it is “a lack of clearness, a lack of precision,” and Professor Beach rewrites a typical passage, supplying necessary transitional phrases and substituting more accurate terms, to demonstrate his point. “I cannot help suspecting,” he concludes, “that the writer who is constantly guilty of looseness in expression in detail may sometimes be guilty of looseness of thinking in the large.” Quoting Chaucer's question, “And if gold rust, what shall iron do?” Professor Beach regards the case of Dewey as “a plain indication of one of the reasons for the inferiority of American prose writing to that of England and France. It is a simple lack of intellectual discipline.”

Far be it from the present writer, having paraphrased not a passage but a volume of Dr. Dewey, to admit that he lacks “intellectual discipline,” if there be any such thing, though agreeing that Dr. Dewey is difficult to read and that this difficulty is in part traceable to his prose style.

<sup>1</sup> Finney, R. L., *A Sociological Philosophy of Education*, The Macmillan Company, 1928, pp. 478-479.

<sup>2</sup> *The New York Sun*, November 6, 1926.

That Dr. Dewey himself is not unmindful of this difficulty, the following quotation will indicate:

I imagine that my development has been controlled largely by a struggle between a native inclination toward the schematic and formally logical, and those incidents of personal experience that compelled me to take account of actual material. . . . The marks, the stigmata, of the struggle to weld together the characteristics of a formal, theoretic interest and the material of a maturing experience of contacts with realities also showed themselves, naturally, in style of writing and manner of presentation. During the time when the schematic interest predominated, writing was comparatively easy; there were even compliments upon the clearness of my style. Since then thinking and writing have been hard work. . . . It is hardly necessary to say that I have not been among those to whom the union of abilities to satisfy these two opposed requirements, the formal and the material, came easily.<sup>1</sup>

Among the sources of the stylistic difficulty of Dr. Dewey, the present writer would enumerate the following: the use of familiar words with unfamiliar meanings; the use of words with pregnant meanings; the use of long, involved, and highly concentrated sentences (cf. for example, the last but one in the previous quotation, p. x); the development of different important ideas in the same paragraph; and not making it clear when he is stating the views of others and when his own. If one might hazard a few guesses, the associative processes of Dr. Dewey's mind work rapidly, and every topic upon which his rich intelligence turns has for him a wealth of associations, all of which seem, as he writes, to tumble out at once in golden profusion and confusion. Further, that he probably does not write from an outline. And again, that he does not revise what he has once written. For example, let the reader compare the half-page paragraph of three sentences composing the first part of his "Preface" in *Democracy and Education*, with the writer's fifteen shorter sentences in three paragraphs (p. 1 below) giving the main ideas of the same. In addition, Dr. Dewey, like Browning, knows and takes for

<sup>1</sup> Adams and Montague, *op. cit.*, pp. 16-17.

granted in his references as known so much history which his readers do not know and which future followers of his pragmatic educational theories are likely to know less and less.

Let it be distinctly stated that the paraphrase here given is not a substitute for the original; it is only a glass through which the original may be read more easily. Students should continue to wrestle with Dr. Dewey himself. Readers should beware of letting anyone tell them what is on one of his pages.

Dr. Dewey is addicted to the use of italics for the sake of emphasis; the present writer is not, though he has retained the italics of Dr. Dewey in the expositions.

It will be noted that there are some repetitions in the main argument, especially where dualisms are involved. The "comments" reflect the same.

It is the purpose of the "comments" to present the writer's points of view in contrast with those of Dr. Dewey. This contrast centers not so much in practical methods of teaching as in the fundamental philosophy of life. Since the writer holds that idealism conserves all the proper values of pragmatism, he holds that the philosophy of experimentalism alone is one-sided, over-emphasizing method and under-emphasizing content. As Dr. Louise Antz says:

We are discussing the relative merits of idealism with pragmatism as educational policies. Pragmatism is one of the most-talked-of tendencies in educational thinking because the most-talked-of leader in education is a pragmatist—Dr. John Dewey. But Dewey's pragmatism is essentially a method, not a philosophical system. As a method, it is probably the greatest blessing that has in recent years come to education.<sup>1</sup>

The composition of this book, it may be frankly stated, has given the writer a better knowledge of the text that he has taught many years and a more sympathetic insight into Dr. Dewey's views, though leaving him no less reluctant to accept

<sup>1</sup> Antz, E. L., "Idealism and Pragmatism in Education," *Education*, June 1926, p. 606.

them. The consistent practice of Dr. Dewey's views would in his judgment substitute an impoverished for an enriched experience. Let the reader read, weigh, and decide!

Having said so much already, let this long prefatory bow include the following human interest document (dated May 20, 1931) by one of my students:<sup>1</sup>

#### REACTIONS TO DEMOCRACY AND EDUCATION

When I am in my sober senses, I appreciate this "Philosophy" greatly. Its parts fit so neatly and accurately into each other, like the well-planned pieces of an intricate jig-saw puzzle. Not one piece is ill cut. Not one piece left to chance. Not one piece a misfit. It is so precise; it is so rational; it is so scientific. The problem of solving it is so stimulating.

But sometimes, when I am melancholy, or dreamy, or fanciful, when I am in a holiday mood, or perhaps, when I have "experienced" education long and monotonously, a strangely illogical longing and a curiously indescribable hunger arise within me for something beyond and above this philosophy.

Like Sissy Jupe, when I do not "walk upon flowers" in fact, I fain would see them upon my mental carpet. Queerly enough, too, I would now and again feed myself some occasional light pie into which no educational planner has ever had an apportioning finger. Doubtless my mind from the cradle has not been practically formed by rule and line. Doubtless my self-devised pies very often give me mental indigestion. The pragmatists claim to know what is good for me.

Nevertheless I become rather frightened when I see the never-ending regions of education stretching out before me, through which, like Tennyson's *Brook*, I must run on forever.

Is my play always to be work, my work always to be play? Am I never to dance for the pure joy of dancing or to sing with delight with the light-hearted fairy, "Heigh-ho!"? Must I sing to please, to entertain, or like little Tommy Tucker, for my supper, and dance just to make my corpuscles behave?

Is there never an "I" except when I am in company? Has society formed the "I" of me, or in my aloneness is there not still an invisible society of God and me—which can mould me as can millions?

<sup>1</sup> Valentine, Marian Gill. Quoted with permission.

Whence have I come and whither am I going? I have made my entrance. I must make my exit. From where? To what? Who is the Stage Manager, I wonder?

Whenever I approach with such puzzling problems that do not happen to fit into the pragmatic philosophy at present very popular in many noted temples of education, the high priests of the activity programs blandly wave me aside, trusting, perhaps, that I will fade away into the misty realms of the transcendent they so often belittle. Not all the *Artful Dodgers* are to be found in the pages of *Oliver Twist*. All the *twists and turns* of the English language can be used by these orthodox to the bewilderment of the non-conformist!

Many of us to-day accept the pronouncements from the rarefied atmosphere of science in education as uncritically, as abjectly, as the people of ancient Egypt accepted the mandates of the priests of Isis and by so doing display as great an act of faith in this scientific age as ever did any ignorant slave of Pharaoh then.

Does not even science itself, and, above all, the science of education, need its critics? Has not Dr. Millikan himself said that we do not know a thing more precise about atoms than we do about souls and spirits? If then, Matter, Reality itself, can never be fully explained, how then can the reactions of such a complex mechanism as Man, one moreover, animated by a mysterious soul or spirit, ever be completely and adequately foretold, analyzed, defined? How, in the innumerable and unaccountable situations in which matter-plus, or man, moves, can other than some infinite Master-Mind ever be completely and adequately all-powerful in control?

Perhaps I should not, at this modern day, be still pondering with my friend, the Elizabethan, Henry Vaughan, of a "country far beyond the stars." I should be content with *now*, and not worry about the before or the hereafter, say my pragmatic friends.

But this whirling present, this *now*, is so uncertain, so shifting, I timidly reply. My spirit is troubled, "my heart is disquieted within me." There must be a Rock of Ages for my unsteady feet to stand upon. I need beneath me the Everlasting Arms. "Like as the hart panteth after the water brooks," there is within me a thirst for that which is beyond and above the mortal.

The pragmatic philosophy welcomes the astronomer—but not the star-gazer. Must I then return to the Elizabethans for a "glimpse beyond the stars?" Or is there a system of philosophy to which I can refer these very scientific educators that will allow me to believe with the poet Ronsard "that this our little life is but a day in the eternal," and where star-gazing with him I can cry to these earth-bound mortals:

There is the joy whereto my soul aspires,  
And there the rest that all the world desires,  
And there is love, and peace, and gracious mirth,  
And there in the most brightest heavens shalt thou  
Behold the very beauty whereof now  
Thou worshippest the shadow upon earth.<sup>1</sup>

If there is such a philosophy, I must make it mine.

Because *Democracy and Education* as a text has proved a confusing wilderness of stimulating ideas to many earnest readers these sixteen years, it is hoped by the author that other intellectual travelers than his own students will find this *Companion* a welcome guide. We would not lessen the profit but increase the pleasure in reading this contemporary educational classic.

H. H. H.

NEW YORK CITY,  
January, 1932.

<sup>1</sup> Pierre de Ronsard (1524-1585).

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