

John Dewey

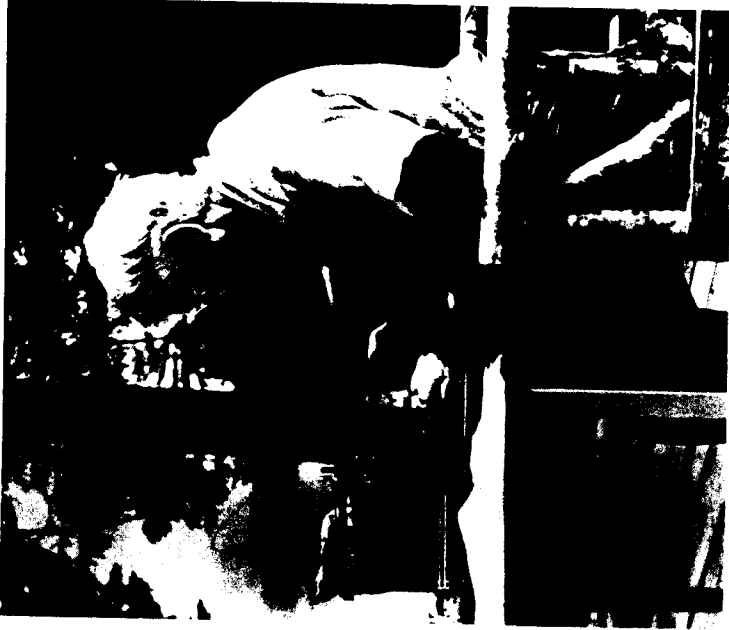
AND AMERICAN DEMOCRACY

* * *

Robert B. Westbrook

CORNELL UNIVERSITY PRESS

ITHACA AND LONDON



John Dewey outside his cabin in Hubbards, Nova Scotia, mid-1940s. Courtesy of the Morris Library, Southern Illinois University at Carbondale.

Preface



IN the spring of 1881, William Torrey Harris, the editor of the *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, received a manuscript titled "The Metaphysical Assumptions of Materialism" from a young high school teacher in Oil City, Pennsylvania named John Dewey. A diffident note accompanied the manuscript, not only requesting Harris to evaluate the merits of the essay but also asking whether the article showed "ability enough of any kind to warrant my putting much of my time on that sort of subject." The essay displayed considerable dialectical skill, and several months later Harris offered to publish it in the journal and encouraged its author to continue to pursue his interests in philosophy. This was the boost the shy young teacher needed during a difficult year in the classroom, and he resolved to abandon high school teaching and try to make a career of this sort of subject.¹

Harris proved to be a fine judge. John Dewey would become the most important philosopher in modern American history, honored and attacked by men and women all over the world. His career spanned three generations of American life and thought, and his voice could be heard in the midst of cultural controversies from the 1890s until his death in 1952 at the age of ninety-two. Over the course of this long career, Dewey developed a philosophy that called for the unity of the-

1. JD to William Torrey Harris, 17 May 1881, as quoted in George Dykhuizen, *The Life and Mind of John Dewey* (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press, 1973), p. 23.

ory and practice and exemplified this unity in his own work as a critical intellectual and political activist. His was a philosophy of enormous breadth and a career of remarkable diversity. Taking the whole of human experience as his field of inquiry, Dewey addressed central issues in virtually every area of philosophy, and because he held that his most important role as a philosopher was to "clarify men's ideas as to the social and moral strife of their own day," he brought his philosophy to bear directly on the concrete problems he saw plaguing American society. His social theory was grounded in the moral conviction that "democracy is freedom," and he devoted his life to the construction of a persuasive philosophical argument for this conviction and to the pursuit of an activism that would secure its practical realization.²

This book examines Dewey's career as an advocate of democracy. I have sought to make the connections between his social theory and political activism by placing his thought in the context of the problems of understanding and action which galvanized his considerable energies. The book is not quite the full intellectual biography that, unfortunately, Dewey has yet to receive. I have focused on Dewey as a social theorist and, in particular, on his conception of "democracy as a way of life," offering an interpretation of the meaning of this ideal and exploring its central role in his work. But this perspective is less limited than it may at first appear. The problems of democratic societies were always on Dewey's mind, and even when he addressed himself to seemingly distant issues in metaphysics, logic, or aesthetics, he nearly always managed to work his way toward a consideration of the bearing of such issues on social and political life. At the same time, Dewey insisted that an adequate democratic theory required a deep-seated philosophical anthropology that addressed the fundamental features of human experience. He remarked that "any theory of activity in social and moral matters, liberal or otherwise, which is not grounded in a comprehensive philosophy seems to me to be only a projection of arbitrary personal preference." For this reason, I have often looked beyond Dewey's obviously "political" arguments and texts and have extended my discussion to matters apparently far from the concerns of democratic theory, narrowly conceived. Not to do so would be to fail to do justice to the centrality democracy had for him, and, like Dewey himself, I have tried in every instance to wind my way toward the implications for democra-

2. *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (1920), *Middle Works* 12:94; "Christianity and Democracy" (1892), *Early Works* 4:8.

cy of every aspect of his thinking. Thus, I would argue that, while there is much more to be said about Dewey than I have been able to say, my focus on his democratic theory goes to the heart of his philosophy.³

This book might be said to be, in important respects, a "Deweyan" book about Dewey, for it is cultural history of the sort he himself favored and, on occasion, wrote. He argued that "the distinctive office, problems and subject matter of philosophy grow out of the stresses and strains in the community life in which a given form of philosophy arises, and . . . accordingly, its specific problems vary with the changes in human life that are always going on and that at times constitute a crisis and a turning point in human history." Sharing this perspective with Dewey, I have put the development of his democratic theory within the context of the stresses and strains of his own experience and of American culture generally in the last century. I treat Dewey's philosophy as one that developed in the face of the intellectual, social, and political problems he confronted as an engaged intellectual trying both to understand and to transform his world. Rather than abstract Dewey's thought from the occasions that provoked his thinking, I have tried to reconstruct the "problematic situations" that moved him to reflection and action, situations as mundane as his concern about the security of his job at the University of Chicago in the 1890s and as earth-shaking as world war and revolution. I have paid particular attention to those occasions in which Dewey's thinking was formed, transformed, clarified, or found wanting in conversations and debates with others such as George S. Morris, G. Stanley Hall, William James, Sir Henry Maine, Franklin Ford, Jane Addams, Bertrand Russell, David Snedden, Randolph Bourne, Hu Shih, S. O. Levinson, Walter Lippmann, George Santayana, Lewis Mumford, Albert Barnes, Harry Wieman, Alfred Bingham, Leon Trotsky, Sidney Hook, Robert Hutchins, Reinhold Niebuhr, and (not least) his first wife, Alice Dewey. Perhaps surprisingly, my work is unusual in this respect, for, although there is a voluminous secondary literature on Dewey's philosophy, the historical study of his thinking remains relatively unplowed territory, and this is the first book to examine the development of Dewey's democratic theory and activism over the whole of his career.⁴

3. "Nature in Experience" (1940), *Later Works* 14:150.

4. "Introduction: Reconstruction as Seen Twenty-Five Years Later" (1948), *Middle Works* 12:256. On Dewey's considerable abilities as an intellectual historian see Richard Rorty, "Dewey's Metaphysics," in his *Consequences of Pragmatism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), pp. 72–89. One of the ironic features of the literature on

I should perhaps stress that, although the book is biographical and historical in method, it has relatively little to offer the reader in search of a psychological portrait of John Dewey. It thus falls short of the ideal Deweyan examination of Dewey. He often said that human beings are thinkers only in the second instance. In the first instance the self was an "agent-patient, doer, sufferer, and enjoyer." Unfortunately, Dewey left little record of his own private sufferings and enjoyments. I have drawn on what evidence there is of his inner and private life when I found that it helped to explain or illuminate his thinking, but much about the man remains opaque, and given the lacuna in the evidence I doubt that psycho-biographers will ever have much success with Dewey. These limitations have sometimes rendered my explanations of *why* Dewey thought and acted as he did in particular instances more speculative than I would like, especially since some of his more important convictions seem to me to be the product of acts of faith—exercises of a "will to believe" in the face of inconclusive evidence—which call for psychological argument.⁵

I am a great deal less uncertain about my explications of Dewey's ideas, that is, my interpretation of *what* Dewey thought, even though this interpretation departs in important respects from prevailing orthodoxies. This confidence may be misplaced, but it rests on systematic research in the available published and unpublished sources, research that has convinced me that many of those who have written about Dewey's social thought have not read his work with the care it demands. Sharing Morton White's conviction that "if you are going to talk about the causes and consequences of philosophical beliefs, you had jolly well better know a lot about what those beliefs are," I have come to sympathize as well with his complaint that, in their eagerness to explore the causes and effects of ideas, American intellectual historians have often failed to undertake a close analysis of the ideas themselves. As a result, we have studies that explore the origins and impact of ideas that never

Dewey is the fact that the best historical study of Dewey's philosophy, Neil Coughlan's *Young John Dewey* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), is devoted to his early career as a neo-Hegelian idealist, before he had fully worked out the positions with which he is most closely identified.

5. "Brief Studies in Realism" (1911), *Middle Works* 6:120. Something of the difficulties that await psycho-historians interested in Dewey is suggested by Coughlan's clever but unpersuasive effort to buttress his speculations about the philosopher's inner life by turning from the sparse evidence available to him about Dewey's psyche to the richly documented inner world of George Herbert Mead, which, we are to presume, paralleled Dewey's. See *Young John Dewey*, chap. 7.

existed in the minds of those thinkers to whom they have been attributed.⁶

In the case of Dewey, knowing a lot about what his beliefs were is a difficult task, for precision and clarity often escaped him. Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes's remark that Dewey wrote as "God would have spoken had He been inarticulate but keenly desirous to tell you how it was" is perhaps the most famous of many comments on this opacity. Nonetheless, Dewey's prose is no more (and, in some instances, a good deal less) obscure than that of many modern philosophers, and it suffers only by comparison with the remarkable literary qualities of the work of his fellow pragmatist William James. Much of the difficulty in understanding Dewey's work can be traced, as Edmund Wilson (one of his editors) commented, to his propensity for "generalizing in terms of abstractions." The recovery of the intended meanings of these abstractions requires that one attend carefully to Dewey's own definition of his terms and avoid the temptation to supply inappropriate alternatives. The literature on Dewey's social thought is plagued by a failure to give such key terms as "scientific intelligence," "social control," and "adaptation" the meanings he intended; indeed, by giving such terms meanings Dewey never intended, some interpreters of his work have managed to burden him with positions he explicitly rejected. This is not to say that Dewey's intentions are always clear or that he was always consistent or unambiguous. Nor is it to say that his writing did not, often at critical junctures, escape his intentions and take on new meanings in the minds of his readers. Indeed, Dewey spent a good part of his later life contesting various misreadings of his work, often with limited success. Nonetheless, these things can be sorted out, and I have attempted to do so. Whether the interpretation I have offered of Dewey's democratic theory is more plausible than others is, of course, another question. It is, I believe, a question of some importance, for if I am correct in my interpretation of the meaning of Dewey's thinking, it is high time to reassess his place in the history of modern American culture.⁷

6. Morton White, "Foreword for 1976," *Social Thought in America: The Revolt against Formalism*, 3d ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1976), p. xiv.

7. Mark DeWolf Howe, ed., *Holmes-Pollock Letters: The Correspondence of Mr. Justice Holmes and Sir Frederick Pollock, 1874-1932* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1941), 2:287; Edmund Wilson to Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., nd, in Wilson, *Letters on Literature and Politics, 1912-1972*, ed. Elena Wilson (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977), p. 198. Alexis de Tocqueville argued that democrats have a special taste for abstract terms. This, he said, "both widens the scope of thought and clouds it," noting that "an abstract word is like a box with a false bottom; you may put in it what ideas you please and take

The consensus of opinion, including that of those critical of Dewey's social philosophy, is that he was a major influence on the ideology of modern liberalism and that Deweyan pragmatism is the most articulate expression of the philosophical foundation of this ideology, an ideology that has dominated political and social discourse in twentieth-century America. By virtue of the role Dewey purportedly played in the shaping of modern liberalism, many have claimed for him powers second to none among American intellectuals. According to Henry Steele Commager, Dewey became "the guide, the mentor, and the conscience of the American people: it is scarcely an exaggeration to say that for a generation no major issue was clarified until Dewey had spoken." He was, Alfred North Whitehead declared, "the typical effective American thinker" and the "chief intellectual force providing that environment with coherent purpose." A less learned but no less generous estimate of Dewey's importance to liberal Americans came from Lyndon Johnson, who remarked that he had found "a deep and lasting significance in Dr. Johnny's belief that the greatest sin of all is to lose faith in one's fellow man." Such testimony to Dewey's influence has been offered by his detractors as well as his admirers. His most relentless critic among the radical revisionist historians of education, Clarence Karier, has argued that "the pragmatic ethic which Dewey propounded free of rigid principles provided the moral dexterity so necessary for the intellectuals who became the servants of power within the liberal state in twentieth century America." This consensus regarding Dewey's influence was perhaps best summed up in the comment of Morris Cohen, one of Dewey's sharpest critics, that "if there could be such an office as that of national philosopher, no one else could be properly mentioned for it."⁸

Contrary to this prevailing consensus, I argue that Dewey's reputed influence is disproportionate to the actual impact of his most deeply held ideals on American liberalism and on the culture generally. It is more accurate to see Dewey as a minority, not a majority, spokesman within the liberal community, a social philosopher whose democratic vision failed to find a secure place in liberal ideology—in short, a more radical voice than has been generally assumed. Among liberal intellectuals out again unobserved." *Democracy in America* (New York: Anchor Books, 1969), 2:481-482.

8. Henry Steele Commager, *The American Mind* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950), p. 100; Alfred North Whitehead, "John Dewey and His Influence," in Paul Schlipp, ed., *The Philosophy of John Dewey*, 2d ed. (New York: Tudor, 1951), p. 478; Lyndon Johnson to James T. Farrell, 30 November 1966, copy in Dewey Papers; Clarence Karier, "Making the World Safe for Democracy," *Educational Theory* 27 (1977): 26; Morris R. Cohen, *American Thought: A Critical Sketch* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1954), p. 290.

tuals of the twentieth century, Dewey was the most important advocate of participatory democracy, that is, of the belief that democracy as an ethical ideal calls upon men and women to build communities in which the necessary opportunities and resources are available for every individual to realize fully his or her particular capacities and powers through participation in political, social, and cultural life. This ideal rested on a "faith in the capacity of human beings for intelligent judgment and action if proper conditions are furnished," a faith, Dewey argued, "so deeply embedded in the methods which are intrinsic to democracy that when a professed democrat denies the faith he convicts himself of treachery to his profession."⁹

It was this ideal and this faith that set Dewey apart from the mainstream of American liberalism. In terms of the criteria of Dewey's testament, much of the history of modern American liberal-democratic theory is a history of treachery, for a rejection of Dewey's democratic faith has become a standard feature of the dominant strain of liberal-democratic ideology. Since early in the century most liberal social theorists in this country have regarded this participatory ideal as hopelessly utopian and potentially threatening to social stability. Unwilling to abandon democracy altogether (although there are some notable exceptions), these liberals have argued, in the name of realism, for revised and more limited conceptions of its ideals. Politically, many have come to favor Joseph Schumpeter's famous definition of democracy as "that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote," a definition that narrows democracy to little more than an ex post facto check on the power of elites, an act of occasional political consumption affording a choice among a limited range of well-packaged aspirants to office. Socially, democracy has for most liberals come to mean the provision of a minimal level of welfare to every member of a society through a corporate capitalist economy regulated by a centralized state directed by administrative experts, which, even when it works, betrays an identification of the good with the goods. Culturally, liberals have left it to conservatives to worry over the absence of a common culture grounded in a widely shared understanding of the good life and adopted a studied neutrality in ethics and art which favors a segmented market of competing "life styles" in which the good life is reduced, both morally and aesthetically, to a set of more or less arbitrary preferences among bundles of signifying commodities.

9. "Creative Democracy: The Task before Us" (1939), *Later Works* 14:227.

Whereas Dewey called for the shaping of democratic character and the creation of a common democratic culture suffusing schools, factories, political parties, and other institutions, other liberals have moved to strip democracy of its positive, substantive claims in order to render it a purely negative, procedural doctrine. Whereas Dewey urged maximum participation by a responsible public in the direction of human affairs, other liberals have sought to maximize the responsibility of powerful elites while at the same time insulating these elites from most of the pressures of the benighted "masses." They have hoped thereby to render the ordinary citizen the passive beneficiary of decisions made by the leaders of competing interest groups: at best, government for but not by the people. This is, to be sure, a very realistic notion of democracy, so realistic that it deprives the democratic ideal of most of its critical function by raising the prevailing practice of many nations, including the United States, to normative status.¹⁰

Dewey did not lose his battle against such realism without a fight, and this book traces not only the development of his democratic theory but also the travails of this theory in the contest with "democratic-elitism." In this ideological context Dewey's thought is especially illuminating and instructive, for the tension between liberalism and democracy has been of fundamental importance in the development of modern American society. As Alan Wolfe has said, "The predicament of liberal democracy is that liberalism denies the logic of democracy and democracy denies the logic of liberalism, but neither can exist without the other." I agree with Dewey's radical critics that this tension shaped his social theory and political activism, and I also readily acknowledge that his work, in some of its aspects, provided unintended aid and comfort to those who constructed the dominant liberal-realist position. Where I depart from these critics is in my estimate that, on the whole, Dewey was a deviant among American liberals, a liberal steadily radicalized by his distinctive faith in thoroughgoing democracy. For him, it was always liberalism that had to meet the demands of democracy, not democracy that had to answer to liberalism, and it is his departures from rather than his contributions to modern liberal orthodoxy I find most significant.¹¹

My sympathies for Dewey's democratic ideals are no doubt apparent throughout this work. The battle for the meaning of liberal democracy goes on, and Dewey's democratic theory retains a measure of impor-

10. Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*, 3rd ed. (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), p. 269.

11. Alan Wolfe, *The Limits of Legitimacy: Political Contradictions of Contemporary Capitalism* (New York: Free Press, 1977), p. 7.

tance for those like myself who are dissatisfied with the limited vision of democratic realism. If, as some political philosophers have argued, democracy is an "essentially contested" concept whose definition is never neutral but always entangled in competing moral and political commitments, then democratic politics is in fundamental respects a never-ending politics of discourse. In such a politics dissenting voices from the past can be silenced by the loss of cultural memory, and it is important, at the very least, to ensure that the more powerful of these voices are not dropped from the conversation or misheard. That Dewey is largely unread today even by those who share his democratic faith is unfortunate, and I am not above hoping that this book might make some modest contribution to a revival of interest in his work.¹²

Sympathy for Dewey's ideals does not entail a withholding of criticism, however, and historians best serve their moral and political commitments when they are willing to be the bearers of bad news as well as good. Among the lessons to be drawn from the study of Dewey's career is an appreciation of the tremendous obstacles that confront the theory and practice of democracy in modern societies. Dewey himself was well aware of these obstacles, and he called for an optimism of will tempered by "a certain intellectual pessimism"—a willingness to "look at the realities of the situation just as they are." He did not himself always sustain this balance of will and insight, but his failure to do so is perhaps as instructive as his argument for its value. It is a tough and demanding stance to maintain, and following Dewey's struggles to hold to it is a sobering experience.¹³

This book bears the marks of the learning, advice, and criticism of a number of unindicted co-conspirators. In researching and writing its first, distant incarnation I benefited enormously from the counsel of Barton Bernstein, who helped as much with the questions he did not ask as with those he did. Later Peter Agree of Cornell University Press took up this role with characteristic grace and sensitivity. Chris Lehmann, Joan Rubin, and Stewart Weaver read the entire manuscript, and I am grateful for their astute criticism and generous encouragement. Thomas Bender, Bruce Kuklick, and William Leach offered helpful comments on portions of my work. A period of animated conversation and debate with Bruce Kuklick proved especially valuable in sharpening my arguments, though I am certain that he remains unpersuaded by much of what I have to say here. Periodic dialogues of

12. On essentially contested concepts in political theory see William E. Connolly, *The Terms of Political Discourse*, 2d ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983).

13. *Ethics* (1908), *Middle Works* 5:371.

the sort that only Cornel West can offer boosted my spirits and enhanced my confidence that, despite the current popularity of Parisian fashions, a lot can be said for thinking in an American grain. Marilyn M. Sale provided me with abundant evidence that copyediting is not an entirely lost art.

Financial support for my work was provided by fellowships from the Mrs. Giles Whiting Foundation, the John Dewey Foundation, and the Morse Research Fellowship program at Yale University. A grant from the A. Whitney Griswold Research Fund at Yale helped defray the costs of a research trip to the Midwest, and a timely leave of absence from the University of Rochester enabled me to finish the book before even my own patience ran out. The kind hospitality of Director Jo Ann Boydston of the Center for Dewey Studies and her colleagues Patricia Baysinger, Paul Kolojeski, Barbara Levine, Diane Meierkort, and Kathleen Poulos made my stays in Carbondale enjoyable as well as fruitful. John Dewey is fortunate to have his legacy abide in such hands.

I am most indebted to those friends who have not only read my work but also shared in uncommon fashion their wisdom, good humor, and a commitment to intellectual history informed by moral imagination. Jean-Christophe Agnew, Robert Cummings, Richard Fox, and Christopher Lasch have, each in distinctive ways, afforded me a better sense of what Dewey meant when he said that "democracy is the name of a way of life of free and enriching communion" in which "free social inquiry is indissolubly wedded to the art of full and moving communication."

I am grateful to my parents for the resources, emotional and material, they have committed to my education and work, even though the benefits, as these things are usually reckoned in our culture, were often obscure. Shamra Westbrook provided unflagging support, invaluable criticism, and a concrete exemplification in her teaching of young children of the kind of education on which the fate of a democratic society rests. My children, Rob, Emily, and Charlie, have arrived every nine years or so to remind me of one of the best questions posed in the literature of American democratic thought, that of a disgruntled character in Richard Chase's *Democratic Vista* who asks, "Must the damp diaper suffuse with its urgent reality even the most soaring ideas, the most fervently pure of commitments?" I have found, as did John Dewey, that the answer to this question is yes, and it is a good thing.

Rochester, New York

ROBERT B. WESTBROOK

Abbreviations

★

Dewey Papers	Dewey Papers, Special Collections, Morris Library, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, Ill.
Dykhuizen	George Dykhuizen. <i>The Life and Mind of John Dewey</i> . Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1973.
Early Works	<i>The Early Works of John Dewey, 1882-1898</i> . Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1967-1972. 5 vols.
Hook Collection	Sidney Hook/John Dewey Collection, Special Collections, Morris Library, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, Ill.
Later Works	<i>The Later Works of John Dewey, 1925-1953</i> . Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1981-1991. 17 vols.
Middle Works	<i>The Middle Works of John Dewey, 1899-1924</i> . Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1976-1983. 15 vols.

PROLOGUE

The Making of a Philosopher



JOHN DEWEY was born in Burlington, Vermont on 20 October 1859, third of the four sons of Archibald and Lucina (Rich) Dewey.¹ Dewey's commitment to democracy has often been attributed to his roots in the egalitarian soil of the homogeneous society of small-town New England. Unfortunately, this simple explanation has little basis in fact. Burlington in Dewey's youth was a rapidly growing city, the second largest lumber depot in the country and the commercial and cultural center of Vermont. It was also a city of considerable social diversity, marked by class, ethnic, and religious divisions between an old-stock bourgeoisie and an Irish and French-Canadian working class that comprised over 40 percent of the population in 1870. Situated between Lake Champlain and the Green Mountains in one of the most beautiful natural settings in America, Burlington was not without the scenery of industrial capitalism as well. The city health officer described the tenements of the poor along the lakeshore in 1866 as "abodes of wretchedness and filth" and "haunts of dissipation and poverty." If anything, it is more accurate to view Burlington as the first of a series of industrializing communities which provided Dewey with an appreciation of the

1. John Dewey was born nine months after the first-born son (also named John) died as a consequence of burns suffered when he fell into a pail of scalding water. John's older brother, Davis, became a distinguished economist, while Charles, his younger brother, enjoyed a relatively obscure career as a West Coast businessman. See Dykhuizen, pp. 1-2; Neil Coughlan, *Young John Dewey* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), pp. 3, 6.

problems of industrial democracy than it is to argue that it was "out of this early Vermont experience that democracy became part of the marrow of his bones."²

Both Dewey's parents were descended from generations of Vermont farmers, but his father had broken with family tradition and moved to Burlington, where he established a grocery business. An easygoing, affable man, he lacked entrepreneurial zeal and was content with modest success in business. His granddaughter later remarked that "his energy was seldom directed toward advancing himself financially and he was said to sell more goods and collect fewer bills than any other merchant in town." He endeared himself to the community not only with his generosity but also with his wit, which often enlivened his advertisements ("Hams and Cigars—Smoked and Unsmoked"). Settling down late in life, he was forty-four years old when he wed the daughter of a well-to-do Vermont squire and nearly fifty when John was born.³

The year of Dewey's birth was a momentous one in Western intellectual history, witnessing the publication of Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* as well as John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty* and Karl Marx's *Critique of Political Economy*. The work of these men would eventually figure prominently in the development of Dewey's social philosophy, but in 1859 it made few ripples on the shores of Lake Champlain. In late October, the attention of the community was riveted not on intellectual controversies but on events in Harper's Ferry, Virginia, where a few days before Dewey's birth John Brown had launched his unsuccessful raid on a federal armory. Dewey's father, a staunch Republican, followed the sectional crisis with great interest and even made it the basis for one of his ads ("To secede or sow seed, that's the question. Those who would sow seed as to succeed and not reseed, will see seeds at Dewey's"). When the Civil War began, Archibald Dewey, despite his age, was among the most eager of Lincoln's volunteers. He sold his grocery business and enlisted in 1861 as a quartermaster in the First Vermont Cavalry, where he was welcomed as a man "of superior intelligence, of strong patriotism, and of a dry humor which made him an entertaining companion."⁴

Dewey's father apparently flourished in the army. Mustered out of his regiment in September 1862, he reenlisted and was promoted to

captain and assistant quartermaster of volunteers. Dewey's mother, however, found separation from her husband unbearable, and in 1864 she moved the family to northern Virginia to be near him. The family did not return to Burlington until 1867, when Archibald went back into business as the proprietor of a cigar and tobacco shop. The devastation and privations of war made a deep impression on the Dewey boys, and according to Sidney Hook, Dewey's youthful impressions of the carnage were an important reference point for his later reflections on the futility of violence in the achievement of human purposes.⁵

In removing herself and three young boys to the battlefields of the Civil War, Lucina Dewey displayed characteristic independence and determination. Although twenty years younger than her husband, she seldom hesitated to assert her will in the affairs of the family. Descended, as Archibald was not, from the social and political elite of Vermont, Lucina had much loftier ambitions for her sons than did her husband. These hopes were fired by the passionate convictions of her evangelical Protestant faith. She had as an adolescent converted to an emotional Congregational pietism that contrasted sharply with the more comforting and rationalistic liberal faith preached in Burlington's First Congregational Church to which her family belonged and with the fun-loving spirit of her husband, whose deepest faith seems to have been in the Republican party. A confirmed "partialist," believing that only a select portion of humanity was destined for salvation, Lucina was constantly inquiring into the state of her sons' souls, asking them—sometimes in the presence of others—whether they were "right with Jesus." Her religious outlook put a premium on feelings of sinfulness and utter dependence on Christ for redemption. When Dewey applied for admission to the church at the age of eleven, he supplied a note attesting, "I think I love Christ and want to obey him," a note written by his mother.

The effect of this relentless maternal solicitude, according to Dewey, was "to induce in us a sense of guilt and at the same time irritation because of the triviality of the occasions on which she questioned us." Under his mother's watchful eye, Dewey grew to be a shy and self-conscious young man, and a certain diffidence was to be a permanent feature of his character. As he matured intellectually, he faced "a trying personal crisis" growing out of "the conflict of traditional religious beliefs with opinions that I could myself honestly entertain." Unfortunately, no record remains of this crisis, only Dewey's carefully guarded recollection of "an inward laceration" produced by an alienating sense

5. Benedict, *Vermont in the Civil War*, 2:580; Sidney Hook, *Education and the Taming of Power* (LaSalle, Ill.: Open Court, 1973), pp. 141–142.

2. Dykhuizen, pp. 1–2, 328n8; Jerome Nathanson, *John Dewey: The Reconstruction of the Democratic Life* (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1951), p. 2.

3. Jane Dewey, "Biography of John Dewey," in Paul Schilpp, ed., *The Philosophy of John Dewey*, 2d ed. (New York: Tudor, 1951), p. 5.

4. *The Vermont Cynic*, 2 November 1949; G. G. Benedict, *Vermont in the Civil War, 1861–1865* (Burlington, Vt.: Free Press Association, 1888), 2:36.

of "isolation of self from the world, of soul from body, of nature from God."⁶

Dewey's mother did not limit her attentions to her own family. Noted especially for her work among the city's poor and her skill as a counselor to young men at the University of Vermont, she was a leader among the women in the church who dedicated themselves to benevolent philanthropy. She sought, as she put it, to "make Burlington a temperate and moral city, a safe clean place for young men, a city of virtuous and happy homes." Her fellow reformers viewed her as an idealist and "a bit of a 'mystic' visionary" who "was always looking forward from things as they are, to what they ought to be, and might be." His mother's philanthropy may well have exercised a formative influence on Dewey's social conscience and, at the same time, shaped his lifelong antipathy to "do-gooders," whose altruism, he felt, betrayed a particularly subtle form of egotism.⁷

Although his mother's religious piety placed constraints on Dewey's emotional and intellectual development, her dedication to the education of her sons guaranteed that he would have the resources he needed to work his way out from under her thumb. Building on the connections that came with the Rich family name, she secured a central place for herself among Burlington's "old American" social and cultural elite and made the advantages of cultivated society available to her children. Dewey's father was, despite his limited education, quite well read (he was heard to quote Milton and Shakespeare as he went about his work in his store), but his ambitions extended little beyond the hope that one of his sons would become a mechanic. Lucina, however, was born of a family with many college-educated men, and she was determined that her boys would be the first Deweys to obtain such a degree. She made a wide range of reading available to them to supplement the woeful curriculum of the Burlington public schools, and in the fall of 1875 John and Davis entered the University of Vermont.⁸

6. Dykhuizen, pp. 6-7; Sidney Hook, "Some Memories of John Dewey," in *Pragmatism and the Tragic Sense of Life* (New York: Basic Books, 1976), pp. 102-103; JD, "From Absolutism to Experimentalism" (1930), *Later Works* 5:153. Dewey was perhaps thinking of his mother when he remarked in 1886 that "religious feeling is unhealthy when it is watched and analyzed to see if it exists, if it is right, if it is growing. It is as fatal to be forever observing our own religious moods and experiences, as it is to pull up a seed from the ground to see if it is growing" ("The Place of Religious Emotion," *Early Works* 1:91).

7. *Burlington Free Press*, 28 March 1899; Sarah P. Torrey, "Women's Work in First Church," in *The Hundredth Anniversary of the Founding of First Church* (Burlington, Vt.: First Church, 1905), pp. 62-63. Lucina Dewey's activities as a counselor of collegians were the model for the character of "Mrs. Carver" in a novel by Elvirton Wright, *Freshman and Senior* (Boston: Congregational Sunday School & Publishing Society, 1899).

8. Jane Dewey, "Biography," pp. 5-6.

The university, located in Burlington, was regarded as one of the finest institutions of higher learning in New England. It owed its prominence in large measure to its fifth president, James Marsh, a leading American transcendentalist who had made it a center of intellectual ferment and educational innovation before the Civil War. During the war years, the school had fallen on hard times and become something of an embarrassment to the community, but after it was named the state's land grant institution in 1865, it managed to restore its respectability if not its preeminence. By the time of Dewey's undergraduate years, the university was once again at the heart of Burlington's cultural life, and its faculty, many of them friends of the Dewey family, shared a liberal Christian orthodoxy indistinguishable from that preached from the pulpit of the First Church. L. O. Brastow, minister of the church in Dewey's youth, calmly assured his flock that "liberal evangelicalism assumes that human intelligence may venture to deal with the facts of revelation and of religious experience and bring back valid results," and the faculty of the University of Vermont dedicated itself to the task of demonstrating that this was indeed the case.⁹

For the first two years of college Dewey was a rather halfhearted student, but beginning with his introduction to the natural sciences in his junior year his interest in his studies accelerated. In his second year he took courses in geology (which introduced him to the theory of evolution), biology, and physiology. He later recalled that the physiology course and its textbook, T. H. Huxley's *Elements of Physiology*, provided him with "a sense of interdependence and interrelated unity that gave form to intellectual stirrings that had been previously inchoate, and created a type or model of a view of things to which material in any field ought to conform." The senior-year course of study in moral philosophy—which included instruction in political economy, law, history, psychology, ethics, philosophy of religion, and logic—also captured Dewey's imagination, and he did well enough in his final year to graduate Phi Beta Kappa. He also managed a good deal of extra reading on his own, concentrating in philosophy on the ponderous tomes of Herbert Spencer and in literature on the novels of George Eliot. Sociology was also a special interest, and he was particularly impressed with Frederic Harrison's anglicized version of the social theory of Auguste Comte. His favorite reading, however, was the British periodical press, and he followed the controversies surrounding evolutionary biology in the *Contemporary Review*, the *Nineteenth Century*, and the *Fortnightly Review*.¹⁰

9. See Julian I. Lindsay, *Tradition Looks Forward: The University of Vermont, a History 1791-1904* (Burlington: University of Vermont, 1954); Dykhuizen, p. 7.

10. "From Absolutism to Experimentalism," p. 147; Lewis Feuer, "John Dewey's Read-

Instruction in philosophy at Vermont was typical of that offered at most American colleges at the time. The central aim of the curriculum was to fortify the religious and moral convictions of Protestant adolescents. The professor was, as Neil Coughlan has said, "the philosophical arm of the preaching ministry," and his task was "to demonstrate *how* philosophy and human reason tended to support the teachings of Scripture (certainly not to ask *whether* they did)." H. A. P. Torrey, Dewey's mentor, was a graduate of Union Theological Seminary and had served for three years as the pastor of the Congregational church in Vergennes, Vermont, before succeeding his uncle Joseph Torrey in the chair of intellectual and moral philosophy in 1868. He continued to preach after he became a philosopher, and he and his wife were stalwart members of the First Church.¹¹

Vermont was unusual, however, in that the college's philosophers had, quite early in the nineteenth century, looked to Kantian and post-Kantian German philosophy for inspiration. By the late nineteenth century, academic philosophy in America had a decided German accent, but before the Civil War (and the Darwinian revolution) most colleges had based instruction in philosophy on Scottish "common-sense" realism. This school of thought rejected the phenomenalism of Lockean epistemology, which had reached an impasse in the corrosive skepticism of David Hume, yet nonetheless set itself firmly in the British empirical tradition. James Marsh had led Vermont on a different path. Marsh, as Dewey said, "was probably the first American scholar to have an intimate first-hand acquaintance with the writings of Immanuel Kant," and in 1829 he brought Kantian philosophy to the attention of his countrymen (including Emerson) with the first American edition of Coleridge's *Aids to Reflection*. In his important introductory essay to this volume Marsh launched an attack on all forms of empiricism, including Scottish realism, arguing that an empirical epistemology could never provide a secure foundation for a spiritual religion. Ignoring the limitations Kant placed on human knowledge of "things-in-themselves" (noumena), Marsh developed a kind of conservative

ing at College," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 19 (1958): 415-421. No one, to my knowledge, has ever commented on Dewey's reading of Eliot (including Dewey), but it is worth noting that there are similarities between the social vision in her novels and that of his philosophy. Steven Marcus has observed the remarkable coincidence of Eliot's social theory and that of Charles H. Cooley, the American sociologist who was Dewey's student and whose thinking resembles his in important respects. See "Human Nature, Social Orders and 19th Century Systems of Explanation: Starting In with George Eliot," *Salmagundi* 28 (1978): 20-42.

11. Coughlan, *Young John Dewey*, p. 15; Lewis Feuer, "H. A. P. Torrey and John Dewey: Teacher and Pupil," *American Quarterly* 10 (1958): 35-36.

Transcendentalism which argued that mankind was possessed of a faculty of Reason whose powers exceeded those of the empirical Understanding and which provided the basis for "a quickening communication with the Divine Spirit." At the same time, Marsh was careful to characterize the intuitions of reason in traditional theistic terms and to avoid the radical pantheism of his fellow Transcendentalists in Concord.

Marsh's philosophy was perpetuated at Vermont by his friend and successor in the chair of philosophy, Joseph Torrey, and by Torrey's nephew and successor, Henry, both of whom leaned heavily on *Aids to Reflection* and the *Remains of James Marsh* in their teaching. Immediately after his appointment in 1868, H. A. P. Torrey began a thorough study of Kant's three Critiques, and Dewey was but one of a number of students to express their appreciation for Torrey's undaunted efforts to convey Kant's philosophy to provincial undergraduates. "Thanks to my introduction under your auspices to Kant at the beginning of my studies," Dewey wrote Torrey, "I think I have had a much better introduction into phil. than I could have had any other way. . . . It certainly introduced a revolution into all my thoughts, and at the same time gave me a basis for my other reading and thinking." Dewey later characterized Torrey as "constitutionally timid," and it is true that Torrey's Kantianism was carefully tailored to preserve Christian truth at the expense of speculative rigor. He utilized Kant's epistemology to deflect the threat of Darwinism and put science in its place as knowledge of "mere" phenomena, while at the same time rejecting Kant's conclusion that the noumena of ethics and religion were equally unknowable in favor of an intuitionism that claimed immediate access to these higher things. This straddling, however, was what his role demanded, and it is fair to say that Dewey received as good an undergraduate education in philosophy as was then available in the United States.¹²

It is much more difficult, unfortunately, to determine exactly what Dewey was taught about history, politics, and economics, but surely it was implacably conservative. His instructor in these subjects was President Matthew Buckham, who warned students against "a dangerous tendency toward radicalism. What we call progress is always on the

12. Elizabeth Flower and Murray G. Murphey, *A History of Philosophy in America* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1977), pp. 408-409; JD, "James Marsh and American Philosophy" (1929), *Later Works* 5:178-196; Peter Carafiol, *Transcendent Reason: James Marsh and the Forms of Romantic Thought* (Tallahassee: University Presses of Florida, 1982); Feuer, "H. A. P. Torrey and John Dewey," pp. 41-44; *In Memoriam Henry A. P. Torrey, LL.D.* (Burlington: University of Vermont, 1906); JD to H. A. P. Torrey, 17 November 1883, George Dykhuizen Papers and Correspondence, University of Vermont; JD, "From Absolutism to Experimentalism," p. 148.

verge of fanaticism. . . . The very term 'radical' suggests platforms, heated resolutions, angry oratory, fanatics with long hair and fiery eyes, scattering invective and scorn, and investing every cause they advocate with associations of bitterness and hate." One alumnus, reflecting on the prevalence of such sentiments at the university, described Vermont graduates as "the coldest, most indifferent, most immovable body of educated men below the Arctic Circle." Whatever deviant opinions Dewey may have collected in these years, it is likely that he derived them from his own reading and not from his teachers.¹³

After his graduation in 1879, Dewey spent three years teaching high school, first in Oil City, Pennsylvania where a cousin found him a job and then back home in a small town south of Burlington. Oil City was a raw industrial boomtown in the heart of the Allegheny oil fields, and here, amid derricks, refineries, and crowded river wharves, Dewey wrote his first article, "The Metaphysical Assumptions of Materialism," which was accepted for publication by the *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*. It was also in this unlikely setting that he had what he later described to Max Eastman as a mystical experience, an experience of quiet reconciliation with the world, a feeling that "everything that's here is here, and you can just lie back on it." He compared it to the poetic pantheism of Wordsworth and Whitman as an undramatic yet blissful moment of "oneness with the universe." He would never lose touch with this feeling, though his interpretation of its meaning and implications would change dramatically.¹⁴

After his return to Vermont in 1881, Dewey combined his teaching with a year's tutorial with Torrey in modern philosophy. He had considerable problems with classroom discipline and began to contemplate a switch to an academic career. One of Dewey's students later remarked that she remembered two things about his teaching: "how terribly the boys behaved, and how long and fervent was the prayer with which he opened each school day." Encouraged by the positive response of Harris to his article on materialism and a second essay, "The Pantheism of Spinoza," Dewey applied to Johns Hopkins University for a graduate fellowship in philosophy.¹⁵

This decision was significant and somewhat risky. The modern American university was only beginning to take shape in the early 1880s, and the well-marked path from secular graduate schools such as

Johns Hopkins to teaching positions in the nation's colleges had yet to be firmly established. Surveying the condition of philosophy in the United States in 1879, G. Stanley Hall estimated that instruction in the subject in two-thirds of the nation's colleges was "rudimentary and medieval" and that there was but a handful of institutions where "metaphysical thought is entirely freed from reference to theological formula." It was plain, Hall concluded, "that there is very small chance that a well-equipped student of philosophy in any of its departments will secure a position as a teacher of the subject." Although Dewey's initial articles indicated that he had, in Torrey's words, "a marked predilection for metaphysics" and possessed "in a rare degree the mental qualities requisite for its successful pursuit," even someone as talented as he could not be certain of making a career of metaphysical pursuit. Most of the prominent metaphysicians in the United States were, like Harris, philosophers without portfolio, independent gentleman scholars who floated free of affiliations with conventional institutions of higher education, and this was not the sort of life open to the son of a Vermont storekeeper.¹⁶

Dewey was undeterred by these uncertainties, and he chose to study at the institution that had made a radical break with the traditions of American higher education by committing itself principally to research and advanced study. Built from scratch and bankrolled by the generous bequest of Baltimore businessman Johns Hopkins, the university had opened its doors in 1876 under the aggressive leadership of President Daniel Coit Gilman, and it quickly earned a reputation among such distinguished scholars as Harvard mathematician Benjamin Peirce as "the only American institution where the promotion of science is the supreme object, and the trick of pedagogy is reckoned as of no value." The student at Johns Hopkins, as one of its first graduate fellows, Josiah Royce, remarked, "longed to be a doer of the word, and not a hearer only, a creator of his own infinitesimal fraction of a product, bound in God's name to produce it when the time came." Desperately eager to enlist in this company, Dewey was undaunted when Hopkins offered him admission but not the financial assistance he needed to continue his studies. In the fall of 1882 he borrowed five hundred dollars from an aunt and headed south to join a new breed of academic professionals.¹⁷

16. G. Stanley Hall, "Philosophy in the United States," *Mind* 4 (1879): 89-91; H. A. P. Torrey to George S. Morris, 11 February 1882, as quoted in Dykhuizen, p. 26. On the institutional dynamics of American philosophy in this period see Bruce Kuklick, *The Rise of American Philosophy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), pp. 46-62, 129-139.

17. Peirce and Royce quoted in Hugh Hawkins, *Pioneer: A History of the Johns Hopkins University, 1874-1889* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1960), pp. 77-92.

13. Feuer, "H. A. P. Torrey and John Dewey," pp. 48-49. Unfortunately, Dewey's senior commencement oration, "The Limits of Political Economy," has not survived.

14. Dykhuizen, pp. 19-22; Max Eastman, "John Dewey," *Atlantic*, December 1941: 673.

15. Dykhuizen, pp. 25-26.

The Wilderness and the Promised Land

★

JOHN DEWEY died of pneumonia on 1 June 1952, at the age of ninety-two. Although he was slowed in his last months by a broken hip—suffered while playing with his children—he remained intellectually active to the very end of his life. Only death could still his illegible typing. Dewey had not been a church member since the early 1890s, but by his own lights his faith in democracy was religious. Realizing this, Roberta Dewey held the funeral services in the nondenominational Community Church in New York City, which maintained that “the core of its faith and the purpose of its life are the realization on earth of the Beloved Community.”¹

At the time of his death, Dewey's influence as a philosopher, educator, and democrat was approaching its nadir. By the early fifties, most American philosophers had abandoned Dewey's larger ethical, social, and political concerns for narrower, more rigorous and professional puzzles of symbolic logic and language analysis. If philosophers took an interest in the “problems of men” it was not in the problems themselves but in the ways people talked about them. As one anonymous young Harvard scholar commented in 1948, philosophy had become “more and more a detailed, isolated, academic discipline.” Among analytic

¹. Dykhuizen, pp. 320–321. Anyone who has worked with Dewey manuscripts will testify to the accuracy of my characterization of his typing.

philosophers, as James Gouninlock has said, Dewey came to be regarded as "a nice old man who hadn't the vaguest conception of real philosophical rigor or the nature of a real philosophical problem." Not the least of Dewey's sins in this regard was his resistance to insular professionalism and his insistence that philosophy could not be and should not be conceived as a specialized body of knowledge. His postwar eclipse was forecast in a genially condescending tribute by positivist Hans Reichenbach in 1939. Dewey, Reichenbach said, had had an admirably "progressive" influence on philosophy, but "the early period of empiricism in which an all-round philosopher could dominate at the same time the fields of scientific method, of history of philosophy, of education and social philosophy, has passed. We enter into the second phase in which highly technical investigations form the indispensable instrument of research, splitting the philosophical campus into specialists of its various branches."²

In the last three decades, the grip of positivism and analytical philosophy on American philosophy departments has eased. The dominance of the kind of scientific philosophy Reichenbach espoused fell victim by the sixties to its own inability to explain how science worked. At the same time, some analytical philosophers, led by W. V. O. Quine, Nelson Goodman, and Wilfred Sellars (all thinkers tinged with pragmatism), began to raise troubling questions about its root dogmas. Of late, bridges have been built to various schools of Continental philosophy previously regarded as unacceptably "soft," and analytical philosophers themselves have extended the range of what they consider important problems to include substantive matters of ethics and politics. These developments have allowed those benighted souls interested in the American philosophical tradition to go about their work in an atmosphere of greater tolerance if not appreciation. Recently as well, social theorists in the United States who once felt compelled by the hegemony of positivism and analytic philosophy to look to Western Marxism for philosophical sustenance have shown some signs of returning home to give not only Dewey but other American thinkers another look, ironically joining those Europeans like Jürgen Habermas who have profitably mined the democratic vein of American pragmatism for years. The editors of *Telos*—perhaps the most slavishly Euro-

2. Bruce Kuklick, *The Rise of American Philosophy: Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1860-1930* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), p. 572; James Gouninlock, *John Dewey's Philosophy of Value* (New York: Humanities Press, 1972), p. xi; Hans Reichenbach, "Dewey's Theory of Science," in Paul Schilpp, ed., *The Philosophy of John Dewey*, 2d ed. (New York: Tudor, 1951), p. 192.

centric journal of radical social thought in the United States—recently remarked that "when all is said and done, if recent chatter about civil society, liberalism, democracy and autonomy is stripped of its mystifying jargon and foreign accents, one is left with a warmed-over version of that pragmatist discourse that engaged Left American intellectuals in the 1930s. . . . Thus the intellectual task is clear. Radical thought in the U.S. has to rediscover its American roots and take it from there."³

No one has done more to revive interest in Dewey among American academics than Richard Rorty, "the red-white-and-blue Nietzsche," who opened *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979), his bold dismantling of the Western philosophical tradition since Descartes, with the blunt assertion that Dewey along with Wittgenstein and Heidegger were "the three most important philosophers of our century." Since that time he has published a steady stream of essays laying out a radically historicist, "postphilosophical" position that he labels "Deweyan." This is not the place to consider fully Rorty's appropriation of Dewey, but it is worth pointing out that it is a controversial one. Positions Rorty calls "Deweyan" are often at odds with what most take to be Dewey's positions on philosophical questions, and Rorty himself sometimes openly admits that his use of "Deweyan" for purposes of self-identification is distorting if taken too literally. "Sometimes," he says, "when we think we are rediscovering the mighty dead, we are just inventing imaginary playmates."⁴

3. Juan Corradi and Paul Piccone, "Introduction," *Telos* 66 (Winter 1985-86): 3. On the recent history of American philosophy see Frederick Suppe, "The Search for Philosophic Understanding of Scientific Theories," in Suppe, ed., *The Structure of Scientific Theories*, 2d ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977), pp. 3-241; John Rajchman, "Philosophy in America," in Rajchman and Cornel West, eds., *Post-Analytic Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), pp. ix-xxx; Cornel West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), pp. 182-193. For a good overview of recent work on American philosophy see John J. McDermott, "The Renaissance of Classical American Philosophy," in *Streams of Dewey* (London: Routledge, 1988), provides an insightful discussion of the differences separating Dewey's thinking from that of analytic philosophers. In a recent interview Habermas remarked that from the outset of his career, he has "viewed American pragmatism as the third productive reply to Hegel, after Marx and Kierkegaard, as the radical-democratic branch of Young Hegelianism, so to speak. Ever since, I have relied on this American version of the philosophy of praxis when the problem arises of compensating for the weaknesses of Marxism with respect to democratic theory" (*Autonomy and Solidarity: Interviews with Jürgen Habermas*, ed. Peter Dews [London: Verso, 1986], p. 151).

4. Carlin Romano, "Naughty, Naughty: Richard Rorty Makes Philosophers Squirm," *Voice Literary Supplement*, June 1987: 14; Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), p. 5; Rorty, "Dewey's Metaphysics," in *The Consequences of Pragmatism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), chap. 5; Rorty, "Philosophy of the Oddball," *New Republic*, 19 June 1989: 38.

What Rorty likes most in Dewey's philosophy is his polemical attempt at "overcoming of the tradition," his efforts to close down the epistemology industry. What he finds peculiar or misguided are Dewey's metaphysics, logic of inquiry, and theory of valuation—his efforts to construct a persuasive naturalism on the ground he cleared as an intellectual historian. As Rorty sees it, it is thumbs up for *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, thumbs down for *Experience and Nature*. Rorty would have philosophers simply be "people who work with the history of philosophy and the contemporary effects of those ideas called 'philosophic' upon the rest of culture." Dewey thought they should be this and more. Rorty urges philosophers to abandon claims to knowledge and rest content with "edifying," "therapeutic" criticism; Dewey, while also warning sternly of the "conceit of knowledge," worried as well that philosophy that was merely edifying would degenerate into little more than an expression of "cloudy desire." Rorty sees philosophy as playful; Dewey insisted it was as an intellectualized wish, hard work. Rorty argues that there is no need for social theorists to consider such topics as "the nature of selfhood, the motive of moral behavior, and the meaning of human life." Dewey thought that as a social theorist he had to say something about such things. "On the Deweyan view," Rorty says, "no such discipline as 'philosophical anthropology' is required as a preface to politics"; Dewey's view was quite otherwise. Rorty seeks to deconstruct philosophy; Dewey sought to reconstruct it. As Richard Bernstein has said, what Rorty slights or dismisses as "trivial" or "mistaken" in Dewey's thought is his primary concern with "the role that philosophy might play after one had been liberated from the obsessions and tyrannies of the problems of philosophy." Perhaps the best way to sum up briefly the differences separating Dewey and Rorty as philosophers is to say that, while both ruthlessly undercut the quest for certainty, Dewey believed effective cultural criticism still might profit from the general "ground-maps" that philosophers could provide. Finding such maps useless and unnecessary, Rorty argues for cultural criticism that flies entirely by the seat of its pants.⁵

5. Rorty, "Dewey's Metaphysics," p. 87; Rorty, "The Priority of Democracy to Philosophy," in Merrill D. Peterson and Robert C. Vaughan, eds., *The Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 261–262; Richard Bernstein, "Philosophy in the Conversation of Mankind" in *Philosophical Profiles* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986), p. 48. See also Rorty, *The Consequences of Pragmatism*, Introd. and chaps. 3, 9, 11; Rorty, "Pragmatism without Method," in Paul Kurtz, ed., *Sidney Hook: Philosopher of Democracy and Humanism* (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1983), pp. 259–273; Rorty, "Solidarity or Objectivity?" in Rajchman and West, *Post-Analytic Philosophy*, pp. 3–19; Rorty, "Science as Solidarity," in John S. Nelson et al., eds., *The*

Pressed by critics to make clearer his moral and political commitments, Rorty has said enough of late to suggest that his "social hope" as well as his view of the responsibilities of philosophy differs significantly from Dewey's. Refusing to accept the ethical postulate conjoining self-realization and the social good which was at the heart of Dewey's ethics throughout his career, Rorty has argued for a "liberal utopia" in which there prevails a rigid division between a rich, autonomous private sphere that will enable elite "ironists" like himself to create freely the self they wish—even if that be a cruel, antidemocratic self—and a lean, egalitarian, "democratic" public life confined to the task of preventing cruelty (including that of elite ironists). For Dewey, of course, democracy was a "way of life" not merely a way of public life—an ideal that "must affect all modes of human association"—and he would not have accepted Rorty's contention that "there is no way to bring self-creation together with justice at the level of theory" for that would have required him to give up a principle article of his democratic faith. Rorty contends that the belief that "the springs of private fulfillment and of human solidarity are the same" is a bothersome Platonic or Christian hangover. If so, Dewey suffered from it.⁶

But even if we grant Rorty a halfway covenant with Dewey, what little he has said about the norms he would have guide public life suggests that he is far too enamored of a strictly negative conception of liberty and too deaf to the appeal of fraternity to claim the Deweyan label even in this sphere. For Rorty, liberal-democratic politics involves little more than making sure that individuals hurt one another as little as possible and interfere minimally in the private life of each. There is little in his social or political vision of the communitarian side of Dewey's thinking, noth-

Rhetoric of the Human Sciences: Language and Argument in Scholarship and Public Affairs (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), pp. 38–52. Other critical responses to Rorty's interpretation and use of Dewey include Garry Brodsky, "Rorty's Interpretation of Pragmatism," *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 18 (1982): 311–337; James Campbell, "Rorty's Use of Dewey," *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 22 (1984): 175–187; Thomas M. Jeannot, "On Co-opting Pragmatism in the Debate about Foundations: Dewey, Rorty and Whitehead," *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 23 (1987): 263–288; Konstantin Kolenda, "Rorty's Dewey," *Journal of Value Inquiry* 20 (1986): 57–62; John J. McDermott, R. W. Sleeper, Abraham Edel, and Richard Rorty, "Symposium on Rorty's *Consequences of Pragmatism*," *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 21 (1985): 1–48; R. W. Sleeper, *The Necessity of Pragmatism: John Dewey's Conception of Philosophy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), pp. 1–2, 7–8, 107–109, 132–133, 189; West, *American Evocation of Philosophy*, pp. 194–210, and James Gouinlock, "What Is the Legacy of Instrumentalism? Rorty's Interpretation of Dewey," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 28 (1990): 251–260.

6. Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, Solidarity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. xiii–xiv, 73–95, 120.

ing of Dewey's veneration of *shared* experience. Rorty argues for the centrality of solidarity in public life, but his is an extremely thin solidarity, amounting to little more than a common aversion to pain and humiliation and explicitly not "a common possession or a shared power." It is simply dead wrong to read Dewey's liberalism, as Rorty has done, as celebrating a politics centered on "our ability to leave people alone." Rorty—the self-proclaimed "postmodernist bourgeois liberal"—seems not to have fully grasped the essentials of Dewey's social philosophy, for, had he done so, it is difficult to see how he could arrive at the conclusion that a Deweyan liberalism could be either postmodernist or bourgeois. Yet here his identification of his views with those of Dewey has been even more unqualified than in his critique of the conventional epistemological concerns of philosophers. All this is not to gainsay the salutary influence Rorty has had in bringing Dewey back into view. Nor is it to deny the rich rewards that reading Rorty can bring. But it is to worry that Rorty will convince his readers that Deweyan and Rortyean philosophy amount to pretty much the same thing.⁷

If philosophers largely ignored Dewey's work after World War II, others were even less charitable. Dewey's philosophy of education came under heavy attack in the fifties from the opponents of progressive education, who took him to task for virtually everything that was wrong with the American public school system. Although his actual impact on American schools was quite limited, Dewey proved a convenient symbol of opprobrium for "fundamentalists" worried about the decline of intellectual standards in the schools and the threat this posed to a nation at Cold War with communism. Following the launching of the Russian

7. See Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, p. 91; "Priority of Democracy to Philosophy," p. 273; Rorty, "Postmodernist Bourgeois Liberalism" in Robert Hollinger, ed., *Hermeticism and Praxis* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985), pp. 214–221; Rorty, "On Ethnocentrism: A Reply to Clifford Geertz," *Michigan Quarterly Review* 25 (1986): 525–534; Rorty, "That Old-Time Philosophy," *New Republic*, 4 April 1988: 28–33; Rorty, "Education without Dogma," *Dissent*, Spring 1989: 198–204. Richard Bernstein has countered Rorty's understanding of "Deweyan" politics with an alternative close to my own. See "John Dewey on Democracy: The Task before Us," in *Philosophical Profiles*, pp. 260–272; "Rorty's Liberal Utopia," *Social Research* 57 (1990): 31–72; and the exchange between him and Rorty in the symposium "Liberalism and Philosophy," in *Political Theory* 15 (1987): 538–580. Three other sharply critical recent assessments of Rorty's political thinking are Nancy Fraser, "Solidarity or Singularity? Richard Rorty between Romanticism and Technocracy," *Praxis International* 8 (1988): 257–272; Sheldon Wolin, "Democracy in the Discourse of Postmodernism," *Social Research* 57 (1990): 5–30; and Thomas McCarthy, "Private Irony and Public Decency: Richard Rorty's New Pragmatism," *Critical Inquiry* 16 (1990): 355–370. See also the "Exchange on Truth, Freedom, and Politics" between McCarthy and Rorty in *Critical Inquiry* 16 (1990): 633–655.

space satellite Sputnik, as two historians of the fifties have said, "the already swelling outcry against the educational system became a deafening roar. Everyone joined in—the President, the Vice-President, admirals, generals, morticians, grocers, bootblacks, bootleggers, realtors, racketeers—all lamenting the fact that *we* didn't have a hunk of metal orbiting the earth and blaming this tragedy on the sinister Deweyites who had plotted to keep little Johnny from learning to read." Since the fifties, variations on this theme have become a regular, periodic feature of debate about the condition of American public education, and each new call for a return to the "basics" has brought with it some predictable Dewey-bashing. Although perhaps every public school district has at least one teacher who has read Dewey and tried to teach as he would have had her or him teach, his critics have vastly overestimated his influence. American schools remain far from the interesting and dangerous outposts of a humane civilization he would have had them be.⁸

The fifties also marked the consolidation of the triumph of realism in American democratic theory. The effort that began in the twenties to transform the meaning of democracy by constricting its participatory dimension had by the fifties succeeded in establishing the hegemony of "democratic elitism" among American liberals. Some realists attacked Dewey's social philosophy directly, but most neglected him and went straight to the task of constructing an "empirical" democratic theory in tune with what were taken to be the facts of life in a complex industrial society. In so doing, they offered, as the best of all possible worlds, a much more limited democratic ideal than Dewey would ever have been able to accept.⁹

8. Douglas T. Miller and Marion Nowak, *The Fifties* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1977), p. 254. On the criticism of Dewey and progressive education in the fifties see Lawrence Gremin, *The Transformation of the School* (New York: Vintage, 1961), pp. 328–353; Patricia A. Graham, *Progressive Education from Arcady to Academe: A History of the Progressive Education Association* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1967), pp. 102–127; and Robert Church and Michael Sedlak, *Education in the United States: An Interpretive History* (New York: Free Press, 1976), chap. 13. For a recent example of Dewey-bashing see Paul Q. Beeching, "Our Schools: Why They Don't Teach," *New York Times*, 25 April 1982. Dewey also takes his licks in the best-sellers of the most recent revival of concern about the sorry condition of American schools. See Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), pp. 56, 195; and E. D. Hirsch, Jr., *Cultural Literacy* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), pp. xv–xvii, 19, 118–126. A good summary of the case against imputing much influence to Dewey on the practice of American education is Joe R. Burnett, "Whatever Happened to John Dewey?" *Teachers College Record* 81 (1979): 192–210.

9. For realist postmortems on Dewey's democratic theory see Arthur Bestor, "John Dewey and American Liberalism," *New Republic*, 29 August 1955: 18–19; Arthur E. Murphy, "John Dewey and American Liberalism," *Journal of Philosophy* 57 (1960): 420–

Unlike Dewey, who believed that "the world has suffered more from leaders and authorities than from the masses," realists continued to fear most the threat they believed an ignorant and irrational public posed to stable and efficient government. Unable to believe, as Dewey did, that most men and women could become active participants in the decisions shaping their lives, realists argued that decision-making power should be vested in elites who possessed the knowledge and skills to govern effectively. Societies that did so would remain democratic in that political leaders would be subject to periodic elections, at which time the masses could decide whether or not they wished to continue to be ruled by the same elites.¹⁰

As these comments suggest, later realists joined Walter Lippmann in conceiving of democracy in narrowly political and strictly procedural terms. For them, the power of average citizens should lie not in their direct participation in public life but in the indirect effect their votes would have on those who made policy. To remain in power, elites in a democracy had to remain responsible to the opinions of the citizenry, and hence citizens as voters retained a measure of influence without any direct participation in policy making and usually without even any direct communication with policy makers. There was a difficulty with this argument, for the realists themselves had demonstrated the effectiveness with which elites could manipulate the public opinion to which they were supposed to be responding, thereby negating the power of public desires and interests to act as independent variables in policy making. But realists attempted to avoid this difficulty by arguing that competition between elites for public support would be sufficient to prevent any one group from engineering consent. The essence of popular government, to repeat Lippmann's formulation, was "to support the Ins when things are going well; to support the Outs when things are going badly." This much, if no more, the realists believed the average citizen could handle.¹¹

436; and Howard White, "The Political Faith of John Dewey," *Journal of Politics* 20 (1958): 353-367. Important contributions to democratic realism include Bernard Berelson et al., *Voting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954); Robert Dahl, *A Preface to Democratic Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956) and *Who Governs?* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961); V. O. Key, *Public Opinion and American Democracy* (New York: Knopf, 1961); Seymour Martin Lipset, *Political Man* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1960); and Henry Mayo, *An Introduction to Democratic Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960).

10. *The Public and Its Problems* (1927), *Later Works* 2:365.

11. Walter Lippmann, *The Phantom Public* (New York: Macmillan, 1925), p. 126. For a critical assessment of modern American elections as instruments of even this modest measure of democracy see my "Politics as Consumption: Managing the Modern Ameri-

For the realists, widespread political participation was not only not a necessary feature of democracy, it was also not a desirable feature. They argued that increased political participation by incompetent citizens might undermine the stability of liberal-democratic regimes by unleashing irrational passions and encouraging demagoguery, thereby destroying the peaceful competition of responsible elites which was at the heart of a realistic democracy. Widespread apathy was thus seen by some as a *functional* feature of an effective democratic polity. Participatory ideals were useful primarily for purposes of legitimation and for ensuring elite responsibility but were not to be taken seriously as ideals. As one political scientist remarked, "It is important to continue moral admonishment for citizens to become active in politics, not because we want or expect great masses of them to become active, but rather because the admonishment helps keep the system open and sustains a belief in the right of all to participate, which is an important norm governing the behavior of political elites."¹²

The realism of the late forties and fifties was different from earlier forms in its tendency to conflate description and prescription. All too often, a description of the way politics worked in the United States provided realists with their normative conception of what democracy should be. Whereas Lippmann and other realists of the twenties had been mainly concerned to open to view the gap between the reality of American politics and democratic ideals, the realists of the postwar period took this analysis one step further and, more or less consciously, tried to establish the reality of American politics as a new ideal. This conflation of the real and the ideal was most apparent in the work of students of comparative politics who used the United States as a model against which to measure the political development of other nations. This use of America as a normative concept was born of the struggle against fascism and communism, for the government of the United

can Election," in Richard W. Fox and T. J. Jackson Lears, eds., *The Culture of Consumption* (New York: Pantheon, 1983), pp. 143-173.

12. Lester W. Milbrath, *Political Participation* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1965). This argument for the convenient uses of the myth of popular participation is a very old one in liberal thought. For an account of its origins see Edmund S. Morgan, *Inventing the People: The Rise of Popular Sovereignty in England and America* (New York: Norton, 1988). The notion that the masses rather than elites were the source of potential instability in democratic regimes was central to the liberal interpretation of McCarthyism, and this interpretation in turn animated democratic realism. See especially the essays in Daniel Bell, ed., *The Radical Right* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1964). Later studies have argued that McCarthyism was not a mass movement but an affair involving the very competing elites upon whom realists depend for stability. See Michael P. Rogin, *The Intellectuals and McCarthy: The Radical Specter* (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1967).

States was the closest thing to a democratic system that liberals could find in a world beset by totalitarianism. The existing American polity became a regulative ideal for policy makers and intellectuals alike, and as such it dampened reform at home and fueled an aggressive foreign policy to make the world safe for democratic elitism. It also revealed the ease with which Americans could fall prey to the confusion of the wilderness and the promised land.¹³

Perhaps the most significant revision that democratic realists made in democratic theory was an ethical one. Not only did they narrow the issues of democracy to those of political machinery, they also continued to argue, explicitly or implicitly, that self-government was but a means to other ends. It had no value in itself, and, as means, it was to be measured against other means strictly on the grounds of efficiency. Realists were less concerned with fostering individual growth than in securing social stability, and they were willing to sacrifice a large measure of self-government to achieve this goal. The central political imperative for Dewey was to develop a society that provided the conditions for growth through participation in community life, participation he believed essential to self-realization. The central political imperative for the realists was to develop a system that was governed effectively and efficiently and retained enough participation to be relatively democratic in a world of more or less authoritarian regimes. For the realists, participatory democracy was not essential to the welfare of the public. For Dewey, it was indispensable.

During the fifties, Dewey's democratic ideals found few spokesmen. Sidney Hook remained a visible and articulate defender of his mentor, but Hook was so obsessed with the struggle against communism that he rarely turned his attention to the shortcomings of American society. Those few intellectuals who did vigorously contest democratic realism and advance a radical-democratic critique of American culture were angry outsiders such as C. Wright Mills (whose work clearly bore the stamp of Dewey's influence).¹⁴

13. On the conflation of description and prescription in postwar democratic theory see Edward A. Purcell, Jr., *The Crisis of Democratic Theory: Scientific Naturalism and the Problem of Value* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1973), pp. 235-272, and Raymond Seidelman, *Disenchanted Realists: Political Science and the American Crisis, 1884-1984* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), chap. 5. A good guide to the theory and practice of political development is Robert A. Packenham, *Liberal America and the Third World: Political Development Ideas in Foreign Aid and Social Science* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973).

14. In his doctoral thesis, *Sociology and Pragmatism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), Mills was quite critical of Dewey, but nevertheless he had absorbed more of

But in the sixties a number of critics of democratic realism emerged, many of them unknowingly advancing decidedly Deweyan arguments for the revitalization of democracy as a way of life. Criticisms of the revisions the realists had made in democratic ideals and a call for a more participatory conception of democracy were heard both within the social sciences and in the larger arena of American politics. Several younger political scientists and sociologists, many of them influenced by the return of radical politics in the sixties, attacked democratic realism as a conservative ideology lending legitimacy to societies that fell far short of "moral democracy." Few statements better captured the gulf separating democratic realists and democratic radicals in the sixties than these comments by radical Jack L. Walker in an exchange with realist Robert Dahl:

Perhaps the most significant point upon which Professor Dahl and I differ is this final question of the criteria to be used in evaluating the performance of democratic political systems. Professor Dahl places great value on the capacities of a system "for reinforcing agreement, encouraging moderation, and maintaining social peace." . . . He is part of a generation which has experienced a series of savage attacks on political democracy and his concern with political stability, in light of all that has happened, is certainly understandable. Political stability is indeed a precious commodity; I do not wish to create the impression that I reject its obvious importance. But I do think that both the discipline of political science and American society have suffered from our excessive concern with the protection and maintenance of our political system. I believe that the time has come to direct our attention to the infinitely more difficult task of involving larger and larger numbers of people in the process of government. The theory of democracy beckons us toward an ancient ideal: the liberation of the energies of all our citizens in the common pursuit of the good society.

By the end of the sixties radical democratic theory was showing signs of life in the academy. Although John Rawls's *Theory of Justice* (1971), the masterpiece that brought American political philosophy back from its deathbed, had little to say about political participation, the revival of

Dewey's philosophy than he perhaps cared to admit. See, for example, the discussion of masses and publics in *The Power Elite* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), pp. 298-324. A useful corrective in this regard is J. L. Simich and Rick Tiltman, "Radicalism vs. Liberalism: C. Wright Mills' Critique of John Dewey's Ideas," *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 37 (1978): 412-430. See also Jim Miller, "Democracy and the Intellectual: C. Wright Mills Reconsidered," *Salmagundi* 70-71 (1986): 82-101.

normative argument it initiated boded well for participatory democratic theory.¹⁵

Disputes over the meaning of democracy were not confined to the academy in the sixties. Political activists from the black civil rights movement in the early sixties to the incipient feminist movement at the end of the decade called for a more fully participatory democracy in America. In the rhetoric of some of these movements Dewey would have no doubt heard phrases that echoed his own hopes and fears. Although one would be hard pressed to claim for Dewey much direct influence on the New Left, his work—especially *The Public and Its Problems*—did appear on its reading lists, and occasionally it was read. Timothy Kaufman-Osborn, for one, has recently recalled:

In 1969, at the age of sixteen, I discovered [*The Public and Its Problems*] on a bookshelf in the home of my parents, pressed between John Calvin's "On Civil Government" and Sigmund Freud's *Civilization and Its Discontents*. I read each of these, but it was Dewey who spoke most directly to my everyday experience. . . . Dewey insisted, although the nation was now joined together by the division of labor into an interdependent whole, this society was no community; for the vast majority of men and women, the democratic public, could neither appreciate nor comprehend the ties which bound them to their fellow citizens. . . . The problem of the democratic public was that its political institutions were no longer its own. I first read this analysis of American politics at a moment when the citizenry of the United States appeared unable to bring to a halt a war whose initiation it had only tacitly condoned and which it now sought to end. The parallel between this situation and that which had stimulated Dewey's analysis of the 1920s was acute and provocative; for it suggested that now, as then, the future of democratic politics turns upon the ability of the democratic public to restore to itself its capacity for autonomous action.

I suspect that this is not a typical story, but if few young radicals could be found with a copy of *The Public and Its Problems* in their hip pockets,

15. Jack L. Walker, "A Reply," *American Political Science Review* 60 (1966): 392. A good reader on the controversy between democratic realists and radicals is Henry S. Kariel, ed., *Frontiers of Democratic Theory* (New York: Random House, 1970). See also Peter Bachrach, *The Theory of Democratic Elitism* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1967), and Carole Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970). Amy Gutmann has argued that Rawls's theory of justice might and should include participatory democracy among its requirements (*Liberal Democracy* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980]).

many did get a dose of Dewey secondhand from Mills, Paul Goodman, and others.¹⁶

Perhaps nowhere did Dewey's ideals echo more resoundingly than in the "Port Huron Statement" (1962) of the Students for a Democratic Society. As James Miller has shown, in its early years SDS activists put the concept of participatory democracy at the heart of their ideology and activism, seeking, as they put it at Port Huron, "the establishment of a democracy of individual participation, governed by two central aims: that the individual share in those social decisions determining the quality and direction of his life; that society be organized to encourage independence in men and provide the media for their common participation." While he was drafting this pivotal document in the history of the politics of the sixties, Tom Hayden—who was heavily influenced by Mills and other intellectuals shaped by Dewey's ideas such as Arnold Kaufman and Harold Taylor—wrestled with the same issues that had been posed in the twenties in the face-off between Dewey and Lippmann. And, like Dewey, he fudged the difficulties of the means to and the forms of participatory democracy, leaving them to be worked out in practice—which they never were. At first Hayden and others in SDS did not intend that participatory democracy replace representative democracy; like Dewey they saw participatory and representative institutions as supplementary and mutually enhancing. But the exacting task of formulating a workable vision of this sort of democracy never got under way. Within SDS participatory democracy quickly came to designate the impossible ideal of an exclusively face-to-face, consensual politics, and SDS groups seeking to prefigure such politics in their own organization found themselves locked in all-night meetings trying to decide such things as whether to take a day off to go to the beach. Finally, in the late sixties, amid growing repression and the romanticization of peasant revolutionaries, the ideals of participatory democracy were sacrificed to an existentialist politics of (often violent) self-assertion in the streets. As Miller says, "In the mounting enthusiasm for 'breakaway experiences,' the original vision of democracy was all but forgotten."¹⁷

16. Timothy V. Kaufman-Osborn, "John Dewey," in Sohnya Sayres et al., eds., *The Sixties without Apology* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), pp. 289–290. Dewey's influence on Goodman is manifest in *Growing Up Absurd* (New York: Vintage, 1960) and *Compulsory Mis-Education/The Community of Scholars* (New York: Vintage, 1965). See also Marcus Raskin, *Being and Doing* (New York: Random House, 1971), pp. 169–264.

17. James Miller, "Democracy Is in the Streets": *From Port Huron to the Siege of Chicago*

The ideological impact of the radicalism of the sixties is still being measured, but it seems clear that, despite the limited successes of radical politics, one of its legacies is a generation of democratic theorists wary and weary of realism and narrow definitions of democracy. At the level of theory, democratic realism is decidedly on the defensive, if not defeated. Recent years have witnessed an outpouring of radical democratic theory by American political philosophers and social scientists, many of them seeking, as Dewey did, to develop hybrid forms of liberal-communitarianism and democratic-socialism, and some of them recognizing that Dewey was there before them.¹⁸

One of the most noteworthy developments in recent American democratic thought is the increasingly radical turn taken by such former realists as Dahl, one of the most sophisticated and subtle of American democratic theorists, who has considerably broadened his conception

(New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), pp. 331, 317. One of the many virtues of Miller's fine book is that it reprints the full text of the "Port Huron Statement." For Arnold Kaufman's ideal of participatory democracy see "Human Nature and Participatory Democracy," in Carl Friedrich, ed., *Nomos III: Responsibility* (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1960), pp. 266-289, and *Radical Liberal* (New York: Random House, 1968). For an astute estimate of the virtues and vices of face-to-face, consensual democracy—what she terms "unitary democracy"—see Jane J. Mansbridge, *Beyond Adversary Democracy*, 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

18. A but partial list of recent work in participatory democratic theory (in addition to that already cited) would include: Benjamin Barber, *Strong Democracy: Participatory Politics for a New Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984) and *The Conquest of Politics: Liberal Philosophy in Democratic Times* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988); Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, *Democracy and Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 1986); John Burnheim, *Is Democracy Possible?* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985); Joshua Cohen and Joel Rogers, *On Democracy: Toward a Transformation of American Society* (New York: Penguin, 1983); Frank Cunningham, *Democratic Theory and Socialism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Robert Dahl, *Dilemmas of Pluralist Democracy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), *A Preface to Economic Democracy* (Berkeley: University Press, 1989); Carol Gould, *Rethinking Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Philip Green, *Retrieving Democracy* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Allenheld, 1985); Amy Gutmann, *Democratic Education* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987); Russell L. Hanson, *The Democratic Imagination in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985); David Held, *Models of Democracy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987); James Miller, *Rousseau: Dreamer of Democracy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984); William M. Sullivan, *Reconstructing Public Philosophy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982); Michael Walzer, *Radical Principles* (New York: Basic Books, 1980) and *Spheres of Justice* (New York: Basic Books, 1985). Of these books, Barber's *Strong Democracy* and Sullivan's *Reconstructing Public Philosophy* are most explicit in linking their arguments to Dewey. For a time participatory democrats even had their own journal, the now defunct *democracy* (1981-1983), edited by Sheldon Wolin. Michael Walzer, ed., "The State of Political Theory: A Symposium," *Dissent*, Summer 1989: 337-359, is a useful summary of recent work in political theory which suggests that things might be moving in Deweyan directions.

of the nature and conditions of democracy over the last forty years. In an article titled "On Removing Certain Impediments to Democracy" (1977), for example, Dahl listed among those impediments inequality, constriction of participation, and ignorance he attributed to advanced capitalism, hierarchical and bureaucratic structures of decision making in large organizations, inaccessible experts, the imperial presidency, and an expansionist foreign policy. More recently, he has contended that the most closely guarded of elite prerogatives—the control of nuclear weapons—should be subject to popular authority.¹⁹

But whatever the triumphs of participatory democratic theory within the walls of the American university, democratic elitism remains ascendant in the halls of power and with those intellectuals who have the ear of the powerful. One of the most widely discussed documents in recent democratic theory was the report of the Trilateral Commission, *The Crisis of Democracy* (1975). This commission, funded by the wealth of the Rockefellerers, was made up of the intellectual and policy-making elite of the United States, western Europe, and Japan. Its report argued that the trilateral nations were suffering from a bad case of "democratic distemper" which resulted from too much political participation by the masses and too many demands from below in the sixties and seventies. This participation and these demands, the report said, threatened the capacity of leaders in democratic nations to make the decisions necessary to ensure the stability of the international capitalist order. Democracies were becoming "ungovernable" and moving toward a crisis that only a further narrowing of the meaning of democracy and an assertion of elite autonomy and control could avert. And this, it should be said, was what passed for *liberalism* in the late seventies.²⁰

The ascendancy of Reaganite conservatism in the eighties has served to enhance the dissonance between public and academic discourse on democracy and its discontents. As Michael Walzer has recently noted, radical political theory is thriving but "leftist and even liberal arguments these days are largely theoretical in character: professors writing for other professors." Without a significant nonacademic audience,

19. Robert Dahl, "On Removing Certain Impediments to Democracy in the United States," *Political Science Quarterly* 92 (1977): 1-20; Dahl, *Controlling Nuclear Weapons: Democracy v. Guardianship* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1985).

20. Michael Crozier et al., *The Crisis of Democracy* (New York: New York University Press, 1975). Two excellent studies of the antidemocratic politics of the last two decades are Thomas Edsall, *The Politics of Inequality* (New York: Norton, 1984), and Thomas Ferguson and Joel Rogers, *Right Turn* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986). Harry Boyte discerns some rays of democratic hope in *The Backyard Revolution: Understanding the New Citizen Movement* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980) and *Community Is Possible* (New York: Harper and Row, 1984).

"political theory is a kind of alienated politics, an enterprise carried on at some distance from the activities to which it refers. The result, very often, is endless refinement, esoteric jargon, romantic posturing, and fierce intramural polemic." Very little of the sort of public philosophy that Dewey advocated and exemplified is being done these days, and we have no public intellectuals who can match him—or, indeed, his adversaries Randolph Bourne, Walter Lippmann, Lewis Mumford, and Reinhold Niebuhr. Perhaps the most pertinent suggestion one could make to help stem the decay of democracy in concluding a book that I am painfully aware is likely to find an audience made up mostly of professors is to call on that audience not only for more Deweyan theory but also for more Deweyan practice.²¹

A few years after Archibald and Lucina Dewey brought their family back to Vermont from the battlefields of the Civil War, Walt Whitman—whom their son John would later designate the "seer" of democracy—wrote, "We have frequently printed the word Democracy, yet I cannot too often repeat that it is a word the real gift of which still sleeps, quite unawakened, notwithstanding the resonance and the many angry tempests out of which its syllables have come, from pen or tongue. It is a great word, whose history, I suppose, remains unwritten, because that history has yet to be enacted"—yet to be enacted, he admitted, even in the United States of which he sang and in which he invested his hopes. But, as Dewey said fifty years later, "be the evils what they may, the experiment is not yet played out. The United States are not yet made; they are not a finished fact to be categorically assessed."²²

Dewey himself devoted his life to continuing this experiment. In the process, he crafted a democratic philosophy of a depth and scope unparalleled in modern American thought. It would be a mistake (and most un-Deweyan) to recommend an uncritical or wholesale recovery of Dewey's philosophy. But it merits another, closer look. If we are to enact the history that Whitman envisioned, we could do worse than to turn to John Dewey for a full measure of the wisdom we will need to work our way out of the wilderness of the present.

21. Walzer, "The State of Political Theory," p. 337. On the decline of the public intellectual see Thomas Bender, *New York Intellectual* (New York: Knopf, 1987), and Russell Jacoby, *The Last Intellectuals* (New York: Basic Books, 1987).

22. JD, *The Public and Its Problems* (1927), *Later Works* 2:350; Walt Whitman, "Democratic Vistas" (1871), in *Walt Whitman: Complete Poetry and Collected Prose* (New York: Library of America, 1982), p. 960; JD, "Pragmatic America" (1922), *Middle Works* 13:399.