

## John Dewey and the Problem of Justice

The problem of justice is again a topic of lively debate. The Civil Rights Movement, our anguish over Vietnam, the Women's Movement, our continuing unease over the economy, skepticism regarding the system of criminal justice, and doubts about our educational institutions identify the main historical forces and problems which underly the current discussion. The symptoms and issues cover a very wide range: anti-busing violence, affirmative action and ERA backlash, proposals for death penalty legislation and attacks on the rights of the accused and the arrested, cutbacks in education and social services, and tax "revolt."

At the level of social theory, John Rawls's *A Theory of Justice*,<sup>1</sup> published in 1971, generated a veritable industry. His difficult and highly praised book seems to have arrived at exactly the right time, perhaps because it offered a powerful statement and defense of what is probably mainstream liberal thinking on justice. Rawls's theory is individualistic, but his recognition of "the least advantaged," coupled with his attention to what he called, "pure procedural justice," seemed to confirm our most basic intuitions about justice. To be sure, there were immediate criticisms of some of the more vulnerable arguments, but these received a greater response from the right than from the left. Indeed, Robert Nozick's critical treatment gave him a recent cover of the popular and liberal *New York Times Magazine*.<sup>2</sup> Not only was the presence there of a philosopher significant and unusual; but he was there heralded as the most articulate of the new spokesmen of conservative, individualistic thinking on justice.

In this context, it may be useful to consider the writings of John Dewey, America's foremost social philosopher. And in this context, if one surveys the voluminous writings of Dewey, writings which span over seven decades until his death in 1952, the first thing that one notices is the relative *inattention* paid by Dewey to the problem of justice. Altogether, there are perhaps not more than a dozen pages of sustained discussions devoted explicitly to the topic. These discussions are insightful and important, little gems, and in what follows, it will be a pleasure to appeal to them. But the first task, really the main task of this presentation, is to try to explain this apparent imbalance in Dewey's attention.

Dewey's lack of discussion of the theory and problems of justice is not to be explained by a failure to *see* problems, nor by an unwillingness to deal with them at the theoretical or practical level. Indeed, the two most substantial discussions of justice were written during two periods of acute crisis in our economy, during the 1890s and again, in 1932. Similarly, Dewey's active involvement in a host of public matters of social and political nature are too well known to recite here. Several of these, e.g., the trial of

Sacco and Vanzetti, raised serious questions of justice.<sup>3</sup> There are, I believe, two sets of reasons which do explain this imbalance. They are important and give us insight into both our problems and Dewey's unique strengths as a social philosopher. One set of reasons specifically regards this stance. As a social philosopher, Dewey was a writer who aimed not to write a social philosophy — *a doctrine* — but who aimed rather to show *how* we must try to seek solution of our social problems. The other set regards the very *idea* of justice. It seems to me that Dewey, for various reasons to be detailed, sought to *displace* justice as the central concept of social philosophy. However, for these same reasons, he found himself using the term less and less, until ultimately he abandoned it altogether. These two sets of reasons are definitely related, but it may nevertheless be desirable to treat them more or less separately, taking the idea of justice first.

### 1. The Concepts of Justice

It is possible to show that there are two dominating conceptions of justice in Western Civilization. The first had its home and only full articulation in the ancient Greek *polis*.<sup>4</sup> Plato and Aristotle, of course, develop it with sophistication and vigor. The other concept of justice was also first formulated in the ancient Greek *polis*, in Periclean Athens. It is associated with the names of Democritus and Protagoras. But this idea of justice did not come into its own until the modern period, with Hobbes and Locke, Kant, Hume, and 19th-century liberal philosophy. We should call it the liberal concept of justice. It remains the dominating concept in the West, and Rawls and his more conservative critics, despite differences, stand in this tradition.

The liberal concept of justice favors atomistic metaphors and voluntary relations, e.g., the contract; it is conventionalistic, arguing that justice and political society are "artifacts" deliberately and rationally constructed; it is legalistic, emphasizing formal and procedural justice; it employs market notions of distributive justice, presupposes scarcity and finally, it is "harsh and hard." As Hume put it, justice is the "mean virtue."

By contrast, the Platonic—Aristotelian notion of justice favors organic metaphors and conceives of human relations and political society as "natural;" it presupposes natural inequalities, emphasizes morality instead of law, and thinks of justice very widely. As Aristotle said, it is "the whole of virtue."

While this is not the place to develop this radical contrast, an illustration of each concept may be helpful if only to fix our ideas.

Plato's *Republic* aimed to answer the question: What is justice? For him, it will be remembered, justice is a condition of the soul, a "psychic harmony," a prerequisite of

just acts and, crucially, of well-being and happiness (*eudaimonia*) itself. Parallel with this analysis, justice is a condition of the *polls* which is itself constructed as an organic unity. Each element, "class" or person, has a task (*ergon*) which, when performed well, contributes to the well-being of the totality. The four virtues, Wisdom, Courage, Temperance, and Justice are each defined as functions of the social and psychic unities of society and self.

At the very opposite pole is Thomas Hobbes. Where men are in "the natural condition," for Hobbes, there is neither justice nor injustice. The consensually introduced mechanism of impersonal law which constitutes political society also constitutes the very possibility of justice. Once done, natural equity and justice is replaced by one principle, "performance of the covenant." The whole apparatus of customary rights and privileges is similarly reduced: "To each according to the agreements he has made."

To be sure, Hobbes's theory was too extreme, too tough-minded. And no doubt, subsequent versions of "contract" theory from Locke to Rawls responded with corrections and additions. Nevertheless, there is a clearly identifiable tradition which must be sharply separated from the earlier one.

Where then does Dewey stand as regards these two concepts and traditions of justice? In the last analysis, Dewey could not accept either, even if he did pull strongly toward the Greek.

In his *Syllabus* of 1884, Dewey noted that "in many respects, the discussions of virtue in Plato and Aristotle are still unequalled." Indeed, following them, if in his own novel fashion, he argued that that "courage, temperance and wisdom denote simply phases of every moral act" and that "the name is given according to the phase which, in a given case, happens to be dominant." "Justice, then," argues Dewey,

is the name for the deed in its entirety.... It is not another virtue, it is the system of virtue, the organized doing: whose organic members are wisdom, the will to know; courage, the impulse to reach; control, the acquired power to do.<sup>5</sup>

As this text shows, Dewey is very, very Greek in holding that justice is the virtue of a unity "organically" related, even if at the same time, Dewey rejected the "faculty" psychology which is generally imputed to Greek moral philosophy. He is Greek, too, in couching virtue in terms of self-development and self-realization, even if for him in contrast to the Greeks, the underlying notion of human nature is open, dynamic, and changing; not closed, static, and fixed.<sup>6</sup> Dewey and the Greeks agreed that persons were doers, exerting, developing and enjoying human powers and capacities and that the

concern for "realization" of these powers should be at the center of a moral and social philosophy.<sup>7</sup> But if so, then "justice" could not be reduced to "obedience to law" or to "just desert." His text continues:

...the current distinction between justice as penal, and justice as concrete recognition of positive merit by the share awarded an agent... is far too rigid.... Unconsciously there is smuggled in the assumption that worth is static; that what a man has done is somehow complete in itself, and serves to indicate his merit, and therefore, the way he should be treated. Service is taken as some *thing* rendered, not as a function...<sup>8</sup>

The idea that "worth" is static and that "deserts" and "entitlements" are like commodities, exchangeable as equivalents for "things" exactly characterizes the market conception of justice, the dominant mode of modern thinking on the subject. Dewey struggles in this text, as in others, to drive home the limiting and incomplete nature of this framework for justice. He writes:

When it was said that the ordinary concept of desert concealed a momentous assumption, it was meant that the whole dualism of justice and love is involved. If justice be conceived as mere return to an individual of what he *has* done, if his deed, in other words, be separated from his vital, developing self, and if, therefore, the 'equivalent return' ignore the profound and persistent presence of self-hood in the deed, then it is true that justice is narrow in its sphere, harsh in form, requiring to be supplemented by another virtue of larger outlook and freer play — Grace. But if justice be the returning to a man of the equivalent of his deed, and if, in truth, the sole thing which equates the deed is self, then quite otherwise. Love is justice brought to self-consciousness; justice with a full, instead of a partial standard of value; justice with a dynamic, instead of a static, scale of equivalency.<sup>9</sup>

Our "ordinary" sense of justice is narrow, *is* harsh. Recognizing, though ambivalently and sometimes incoherently, that persons are dynamic selves relating humanly to one another and to the world, we think of justice as requiring supplementation, by mercy, by kindness, by love. But surely *that* misleads as well. It is not either justice or love. It is not justice *or* charity — from *caritas*, "love." This accepts the dualism and allows us to paste over *injustice* with *gratuities*. But how to overcome this dualism? Dewey had it right: Once we reject the idea that "deeds" are "things" to be exchanged for equivalents, we undermine the dualism, for then, it is possible to link the deed with the self. But Dewey remains contaminated by the market theory of justice. Significantly, he puts the matter conditionally: *if* justice be the returning to a person of the equivalent of his deed. And

he lets us muse as to whether he would have preferred to deny the hypothesis altogether. But *if* we are to think of justice in these terms, and as moderns, it is hard to see how to do otherwise, then for Dewey, at least at this point, let us try *not* to disconnect the deed from the vital, changing self.

Dewey will return to these themes just twice more, in the *Ethics* written collaboratively with James Tufts, published originally in 1908 and then in substantial revision in 1932.<sup>10</sup> As in the earlier *Syllabus*, Dewey focuses on the notion that justice is "hard" and "harsh" and he develops another dimension of this attitude. Here, he argues that it comes from identifying justice "with the working of some fixed and abstract law... as if man was made for law, not law for man." Although pursuing this idea systematically would take us directly into Dewey's problem-centered and inquiry-oriented style of social philosophy, we should pause here if only briefly to emphasize the pervasiveness of the notion, as it bears on the problem of justice.

Dewey clearly saw that alongside the market conceptualization of justice was another which derived ultimately from Kant. It put heavy emphasis on duty and obligation and its most austere and rigorous form is captured by the Latin, *Fiat justitia, ruat coelum*, "let justice be done, let the heavens fall." Dewey took this phrase as the title for a brief, popular essay written for the *New Republic* in 1971. Rejecting the legalism and formalism which so typically characterizes "moral" discussions of justice, whether of war and international relations, as in this case, or of race or sex, Dewey identified such ethics as "resolutely irrelevant to the circumstances of action and the conditions of life."<sup>12</sup> In another and earlier essay, entitled "Nature and Reason in Law" (1914), Dewey pregnantly characterized "the chief working difference between moral philosophies in their application to law." It was, he argued, that "some of them seek for an antecedent principle by which to decide; while others recommend the consideration of the specific consequences that flow from treating a specific situation this way or that, using the antecedent materials and rules as guides of intellectual analysis but not as norms of decision."<sup>13</sup> This text, we might note here, could well be the point of departure for an extended analysis of the current debate over affirmative action programs as, of course, it compresses an entire potential legal philosophy.

For Dewey, this methodological inversion explained in part the limiting and narrowing conception of justice. And in the 1908 discussion, Dewey again calls, optimistically, for "the transformation of the conception of justice so that it joins hands with love and sympathy."<sup>14</sup>

But one can hardly be heartened by these remarks. The problem seems inescapable. The liberal notion of justice was liberating insofar as it made men

indiscriminately subject to impersonal law and insofar as it broke the basis of "privilege" based on hereditary status, but Dewey saw early on that the liberal notion was far too narrow, too rigid. So he struggled to enlarge it, to remedy its partiality, to supplement it. And if we grant that love and sympathy are the requisite supplementations, one may legitimately wonder how *good a* merely just society or merely just person would be? For the Greek, this could not be a question. With their notion of justice, the just man and the just society had to be good. And, of course, if love and sympathy are the requisite supplementations to our "ordinary" sense of justice, then one may legitimately wonder how we are to proceed. Indeed, the deeper Dewey looked into the problems and issues of liberal society, the more disjointed became the effort to transform and widen liberal justice.

## II. Liberal Society and Distributive Justice

Dewey was never sanguine regarding the mechanisms of distribution in liberal society. Still less was he mystified by the rhetoric of the current theories. This may be brought out by considering Tufts's contribution to the collaborative 1908 edition of their *Ethics*. Dewey must surely have endorsed the pertinent pages. Indeed, in the revision of 1932, it seems that Dewey himself wrote the crucial Chapter 21 which restated the issues and reaffirmed their earlier stance. We may look first at the earlier version, noting well the early date of the text.

Characteristically, the locus of the critique is "individualism." They begin by arguing that if we take a purely "formal" view and make "formal freedom of contract the only criterion, then any price is fair which both parties agree to."<sup>15</sup> This position, characteristic of Hobbes, and of classical and neoclassical political economy, is substantially the position argued for by Nozick in the recent work cited earlier. Although the argument *cannot* be developed here, Nozick's "entitlement" theory, while very much enriched by detail and the sophistication of modern decision theory, is, I would argue, subject quite precisely to Tufts's criticism. It is this: If the exchange is to be fair, the parties to the bargain must be equal. "*But in a large part of the exchanges of business and services, the two parties are not equal.*"<sup>16</sup> In other terms, where some *must* accept the conditions of the contract, "formal freedom of contract" is not a sufficient condition. In his 1932 statement of this theory, Dewey characterizes it even more economically. Its motto is to each "what he can get through his ability, his shrewdness, his advantageous economic position due to inherited wealth and every other factor which adds to his bargaining power..." Dewey rightly notes that "this is the existing method under capitalism,"<sup>17</sup> as today, owners of baseball teams, school boards, and the AMA tend to forget.

The "take-advantage-of-your-bargaining-power" theory of justice has another, less

rude, version. It is characterized by Dewey by the motto: "To each what he earns." This theory, plausible enough on its face, due perhaps to the multitude of difficulties concealed in the notion of "earn," does not, argues Dewey, characterize capitalist distribution. But it must be rejected in any case, since it cannot be realized. It cannot be realized because production is *social*.<sup>18</sup> The point is important but often misunderstood.

In "producing" — toasters, services, skills, or knowledge — individuals employ knowledge, skills, and instruments which are the legacy of previous generations of workers. Moreover, and characteristically, "products" — including knowledge — are jointly produced in the more obvious sense that they are products of many hands and minds. Suppose, then, we take the Gross National Product to represent the combined social product — an entirely artificial measure for the "product" we need to measure, but useful perhaps to fix our ideas. The earning theory of distribution, then (like its sophisticated relative, modern productivity theory), presupposes that it is possible to divide up the GNP and assign to each individual exactly what is hers of his. No part of this is to be shared on grounds that we can't disentangle our contribution; no part is a residue earned by past labor and no part is earned by no one. The problem here is not simply whether this division is *fair*, whether each receives a just share, but whether, indeed, any coherent sense can be given to the idea that respective contributions to the social product can be so disentangled. For Dewey, rightly, it was obvious that they could not.<sup>19</sup>

But this is not the end of the difficulties for the individualistic theories, for as Dewey and Tufts write, they suffer from a serious moral failure. Achievement and failure, what one does "contribute," or "earn" is a function of three things: heredity, social advantage and the socially produced conditions of knowledge and environment and, finally, individual effort. It is not a matter of individual effort alone. It is at this juncture that Rawls's influential theory departs from traditional individualisms, for with Tufts and Dewey, Rawls agrees that accidents of birth — the good fortune to be born rich and handsome — are not *in themselves* morally relevant. And indeed, if so, then one can ask, as does Dewey and Tufts, "If all men are accounted equal in the State, why not in wealth?"

It is perhaps here that the contrast in the orientation of Dewey and of Rawls is most graphic and where, at the same time, Dewey reveals both his greatest strength as a social philosopher and perhaps, as well, his greatest weakness.

Consider Rawls's response first.<sup>21</sup> For Rawls, the family is the key problem and, short of restructuring it, natural talents and social advantages will inevitably be rewarded. I think that it can easily be shown that Rawls gives up too quickly here. Indeed, as we

suggest, Dewey and Tufts have a more encouraging response. But Rawls's originality begins at exactly this point, for his famous "difference principle" is meant precisely to justify inequalities which, however they come about, had best *not* be removed. His argument is quite straightforward. An egalitarian distribution would be *inefficient* but an efficient system need not be just. It would be just, however, if social and economic inequalities were arranged so that there was "fair equality of opportunity" and, crucially, so that the "least advantaged" were better off than they otherwise would have been. If Rawls is right, something looking very much like *our* system is, in his terms, "nearly just." To be sure, we have some way to go in achieving "fair equality of opportunity" — notice that this still rewards *natural* ability and that, for Rawls, the family remains (and will remain) a crucial limitation even on this. Nevertheless, it is fair to say that, for Rawls, we are doing perhaps as well as can be expected.

Tufts and Dewey take an entirely different tack. After evaluating the extant theories, they offer, instead of their own theory, what they call "a working program." The gist of it is contained in a short paragraph:

A man's power is due (1) *to* physical heredity; (2) to social heredity... (3) to his own efforts. Individualism *may* properly claim *this* third factor. It is just to treat men unequally so far as their efforts are unequal. It is socially desirable to give as much incentive as possible to the full development of everyone's powers. *But this very same reason demands that in the first two respects we treat men as equally as possible.*<sup>22</sup>

This working program is *radical* since, ultimately, it means that no unequal benefits should accrue to persons exclusively on the basis of their natural talents or on the basis of socially derived advantages. But it is a "working program" in the sense that it leaves entirely open the means by which the ideal is to be achieved. It does not demand radical revolution in order to achieve a radical restructuring of society, even if the realization of the ideal would involve a radical restructuring of society. And it does not insist on any particular ameliorative reforms, even if there are steps which could and should be taken. And it is in this that Dewey's greatest strength and weakness may be revealed. For it is not at all easy to judge whether or not Dewey saw *how* radical the ideal was or how radical would the changes have to be to bring the ideal into existence. In both the 1908 and the 1932 discussions, education characteristically is emphasized as means. But "conditions of food, labor and housing" and "the importance of private property" are also identified. In the later discussion, Dewey responded passionately to the notion that because per capita income had increased greatly — shades of Rawls! — it was "foolish" to raise the question of distribution. Indeed, in direct contrast to Rawls, he argued that *wealth*, not income is the crucial variable:

The individuals or corporations that have great wealth undertake great enterprises. They control for better or worse the wages and living conditions of great numbers.<sup>23</sup>

These same sorts of criticisms are found in many of Dewey's writings and demonstrate that he was keenly aware of the bearing of the system of private property not only on the problem of justice, but on the problem of freedom and democracy as well.<sup>24</sup> Yet, many commentators have found grounds for arguing that Dewey was naive in having unwarranted hopes for the efficacy of education even as an ameliorative factor. This is probably so.<sup>25</sup>

The current backlash on affirmative action and ERA, the decisive, if inevitable failures of poverty programs and efforts to guarantee equal education for all, would indeed have been disheartening to Dewey. And as disheartening, perhaps, is the renewed enthusiasm for what are really quite worn out individualistic theories of justice. His own theory could be stated in a sentence, first written in 1891: "What is due the self is that it be treated as self."<sup>26</sup> In the last analysis, Dewey preferred working programs over theories. Indeed, this takes us to the final part of our account.

### **III. Social Knowledge and Social Philosophy**

It is another of the commonplaces of commentators on John Dewey's thought that he was preoccupied with method, indeed sometimes to the extent that *content* altogether seemed to dissolve.<sup>27</sup> This is not the place to examine all the difficult questions which attend this criticism, but as regards our particular problem, the problem of justice, I think that it must be said that Dewey's social philosophy does represent a departure from traditional social philosophies and that this shift is perhaps best construed as an orientation which displaced the problem of justice as a substantive theoretical problem and replaced it with an orientation which emphasized problems and ideas that connected more directly to method and to practice.

This alternative point of departure in Dewey's thought may be best expressed in *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (1920) although many texts confirm the idea. Identifying three alternative social philosophies, the individualistic, the socialist, and the organic, Dewey argued that all "suffer from a common defect."

They are all committed to the logic of general notions under which specific situations are to be brought.... They are general answers supposed to have universal meaning that covers and dominates all particulars. Hence, they do not assist inquiry. They close it. They are not instrumentalities to be employed

and tested in clarifying concrete social difficulties.... The social philosopher, dwelling in the region of his concepts, solves problems by showing relationships of ideas, instead of by helping men solve problems in the concrete...."

This is the touchstone idea of Dewey's emphasis on "inquiry," "experimentalism," and "instrumentalism." Within Dewey's frame, current debate on justice would suffer from the same defects of abstraction, from the same irrelevance to the *actual* conditions of education, of work, and of association, from the same aristocratic detachment that seems presupposed by the idea that "philosophers" can *solve* human problems. Dewey's critics on the left are also correct, however, in judging that his experimentalist and method-centered attitude left him vulnerable to two alternative – and at bottom inconsistent – sorts of readings.

On the one hand, Dewey's efforts to shift the focus of social philosophy away from "doctrine" led some to see Dewey as advocating an engineering and scientific conception of social philosophy and inquiry. This view, inspired by Dewey's repeated assertion that social questions could be treated "scientifically" and "experimentally," meant for those readers something like the sort of practice which presumably goes in "laboratories" manned by persons in white coats and constrained by canons of "efficiency" and "positive" control. On this view – technocratic and still fashionable – a new breed of "social scientists" would provide that "expert" knowledge that would speedily solve concrete social problems.

In the last analysis, this reading cannot be sustained, even if Dewey did give ample room for misconstrual. Perhaps his willingness and openness to incorporate and encourage ideas which seemed congenial to him further confused matters. One might mention here his long association with A.F. Bentley and his attraction in the late 1920s to the "operationist" views of P.W. Bridgman.<sup>29</sup>

On the other hand, it led others to see Dewey as committed to a kind of *unprincipled* reformism, to a defense of patchwork suggestions as responses to the outcropping of crisis. Dewey was reformist in his attitude, rejecting consistently the idea that societies could be *intelligently* transformed by radical and revolutionary programs. His approach was "piecemeal," a call to deal amelioratively with concrete and particular problems. Thus, for him, Marxism was "doctrinaire" in offering "sweeping generalizations" and "general solutions" to "general problems." Dewey was surely sensitive to the problem of the "unintended consequences" of radical change and to the ease with which progressive movements become appropriated and distorted. But it must be said as well that while his *ideals* were radical, as we already noted, his appreciation

of obstacles preventing their realization was probably naive. Nevertheless, his reformism was hardly unprincipled and his shift in focus was both sound and important. Indeed, I believe that there is much to be learned from him on this score.

For Dewey, the problem of justice, as the problems of freedom and democracy, cannot be "solved" by "experts" or by philosophers. They could only be solved — if that is still the right word — by people in the everyday world in their doings and sufferings. Dewey seems to have grasped this and that is why, in the last analysis, the "content" of his social philosophy seems so thin and, finally, so painfully obvious. There are, it seems to me, but two items in it: First, there is the idea that "the level of action fixed by embodied intelligence is always the important thing,"<sup>30</sup> and second, the idea that "democracy is a way of life, individual and social."<sup>31</sup> These crucially related ideas defined the limits of social philosophy. Movement in the direction of their realization was movement toward an ideal in the only sense of ideal which Dewey allowed — "the tendency and movement of some thing which exists carried to his final limit."<sup>32</sup> As with justice, they identified a "working program" and, crucially, a program which could be implemented *only* by people in their individual and collective doings and sufferings.

This did not mean, for Dewey, that philosophy had *nothing* to do. Indeed, there was a great deal to be said about both ideals and about their mode of realization. The whole of Dewey's extensive writings on methods of inquiry and on education, both in and out of the school, issue in the idea of "action fixed by embodied intelligence." As Dewey saw it, the application of "intelligence" to social problems meant not the application of new techniques by "experts," however defined, nor did it reduce to the application of antecedently derived principles to concrete particular situations. Rather, the canons had to be generated in inquiry and realized in practice. And this kind of social knowledge "does not yet exist."<sup>33</sup> "The only possible solution," he wrote, to the problems generated by interdependence require "the perfecting of the means and ways of communication of meanings so that genuine shared interest in the consequences of interdependent activities may inform desire and effort and thereby direct action."<sup>34</sup> And as this text suggests, this was both condition and consequence of democracy as a way of life, the other guiding ideal of Dewey's social philosophy. Accordingly, the whole of his writings on democracy, community, freedom, and culture bear on this second theme. Keeping this in mind allows us, finally, to grasp the full force of this wonderful text:

Philosophy recovers itself when it ceases to be a device for dealing with the problems of philosophers and becomes a method, cultivated by philosophers, for dealing with the problem of men.<sup>35</sup>

If it is philosophers who have the task of articulating and “cultivating” these methods, it is people themselves who must employ them. Dewey was insufficiently radical regarding the difficulties standing in the way of transforming “The Great Society” into “The Great Community,” but he never fell victim to pat solutions. He saw that we never begin anew, from scratch, from nothing. We either sustain the inherited forms or we transform them, purposefully and intelligently, whimsically and stupidly, coercively or cooperatively. Dewey put his faith in the possibility that action could be conjoint, purposeful, and intelligent. He put the matter crisply in his 1919/20 lectures in China. Responding to the question, “Where should we start in reforming our society?” Dewey answered:

...we must start by reforming the component institutions of the society. Families, schools, local governments, the central government — all these must be reformed, but they must be reformed by the people who constitute them, working as individuals — in collaboration with other individuals, each accepting his own responsibility.... Social progress is neither an accident nor a miracle; it is the sum of efforts made by individuals whose actions are guided by intelligence.<sup>36</sup>

But he also saw, as John J. McDermott has written, that if “the responsibility is ours and ours alone,” the transformation of the processes and forms of living is, at the same time, “laced with chance.”<sup>37</sup>

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Belnap Press, 1971).

<sup>2</sup> Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State and Utopia* (New York: Basic Books, 1974).

<sup>3</sup> See George Dykhuizen, *The Life and Mind of John Dewey* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois Press, 1973), p. 234.

<sup>4</sup> See my “Two Concepts of Justice,” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 4 (1977):99—121.

<sup>5</sup> *The Study of Ethics: A Syllabus* (Ann Arbor, MI: Inland Press, 1894), quoted from Jo Ann Boydston, ed., *John Dewey: The Early Works 1882—1898* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois Press, 1971), pp. 362, 357.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. here, of course, *Human Nature and Conduct* (New York: Henry Holt, 1922).

<sup>7</sup> C.B. Macpherson has argued that J.S. Mill tried to incorporate this fundamental feature of Greek Idealism into his liberalism, though the result was less than satisfactory. See his *Democratic Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973).

<sup>8</sup> *Syllabus*, in *Early Works*, p. 359.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 361.

<sup>10</sup> Quotations from the 1908 edition are cited from Jo Ann Boydston, ed., *John Dewey: The Middle Works 1899—1924* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois Press, 1978), vol. 5. Quotations from the 1932 revision from John Dewey and James H. Tufts, *Ethics* (New York: Henry Holt, revised edition, 1932).

<sup>11</sup> Boydston, *Middle Works*, p. 373.

<sup>12</sup> *Characters and Events: Popular Essays in Social and Political Philosophy* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1929), two vols., p. 592.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 795.

<sup>14</sup> Boydston, *Middle Works*, p. 373f.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 475.

<sup>16</sup> Dewey gives the same argument against "classical individualism and free enterprise" in his lectures in China. See *John Dewey: Lectures in China, 1919-1920*, edited and translated from the Chinese by Robert W. Clopton and Tsuin-Chen Ou (Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1973), p. 113.

<sup>17</sup> Dewey and Tufts, *Ethics*, p. 454.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> It may be noted here that modern price theory employs the fiction that marginal products are so divisible. This makes for quite a respectable mathematical theory, useful as a praxiology. But it doesn't follow that a theory of justice which assumes the fiction is intelligible. In this regard, Nozick's criticism of Rawls is interesting. Rawls sees, if not clearly, that "social cooperation" does make a difference. By assuming that marginal products can be "disentangled," Nozick argues that Rawls's account of the "problem"

created by social cooperation is mistaken. Nozick does show, however, that Rawls's individualism does not square with his view of "social cooperation." See Nozick, *Anarchy, State and Utopia*. This choice of inconsistency or unintelligibility would have been avoided had these contemporary writers understood (or read *and* understood) Dewey's early critique of individualism.

<sup>20</sup> Boydston, *Middle Works*, p. 488.

<sup>21</sup> The following is drawn from *A Theory of Justice*, especially from sections 12, 13, 17, 46, 77.

<sup>22</sup> Boydston, *Middle Works*, p. 490.

<sup>23</sup> Dewey and Tufts, *Ethics*, p. 454. Rawls obliterates the distinction between income and wealth by inattention. He persistently refers to "income and wealth" but never addresses the difference. Accordingly, for him it would seem to be unimportant.

<sup>24</sup> See, e.g., *The Public and Its Problems* (Chicago: Swallow Press, 1927, 1954), pp. 101 f., 107; "Philosophies of Freedom," in R.J. Bernstein, ed., *On Experience, Nature and Freedom* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1960), p. 271; *Liberalism and Social Action*, excerpted in John J. McDermott, ed., *The Philosophy of John Dewey* (New York: G.P. Putnam's, 1973), two vols., p. 648.

<sup>25</sup> For example, R.J. Bernstein, *Praxis and Action* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971), p. 228; C.W. Mills, *Sociology and Pragmatism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 333.

<sup>26</sup> Boydston, *Middle Works*, p. 359.

<sup>27</sup> The most recent discussion and relevant to what follows is Charles Frankel, "Dewey's Social Philosophy," in *New Studies in the Philosophy of John Dewey*, ed. S. M. Cahn (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1977).

<sup>28</sup> *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (Boston: Beacon Press, enlarged edition, 1929, 1948), pp. 188, 189, 192.

<sup>29</sup> Although the point can hardly be developed here, there is a "positivist" strain in Dewey. Unfortunately, it is a strain emphasized by his friends and enemies alike. See above, Chapter 1.

<sup>30</sup> *Public and Its Problems*, p. 166.

<sup>31</sup> Quoted from Joseph Ratner, ed., *Intelligence in the Modern World* (New York: Modern Library, 1939), p. 400.

<sup>32</sup> *Public and Its Problems*, p. 148.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 166.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 155.

<sup>35</sup> "The Need for a Recovery of Philosophy," in McDermott, *The Philosophy of John Dewey*, p. 95.

<sup>36</sup> *Lectures in China*, p. 62f.

<sup>37</sup> McDermott, *The Philosophy of John Dewey*, p. xxi

