# Pragmatism, Pluralism, and Public Democracy

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**mots-clés/key-words**

pragmatism; participatory; democracy; cultural pluralism; Dewey; DuBois; Rorty

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pragmatisme ; démocratie ; participative ; pluralisme culturel ; Dewey ; DuBois ; Rorty

*Dans les années 1920 et 1930, les arguments développés en faveur d'une démocratie pluraliste et participative contribuèrent à l'émergence de mouvements tels que le pacifisme, la défense des travailleurs et des minorités ethniques et le combat en faveur des droits civiques. En matière de pluralisme et de démocratie libérale, des penseurs pragmatistes, au nombre desquels figuraient John Dewey, Horace Kallen, Randolph Bourne, Jane Addams et W. E. B DuBois, développaient alors des théories analogues à même de justifier les causes progressistes. Les écrits de DuBois démontrent qu'il était sensible à la distinction, également présente chez d'autres pragmatistes, entre deux versions du multiculturalisme, l'une fondée sur la coexistence de groupes étanches entre lesquels existe un rapport de concurrence, et l'autre, bien préférable, sur l'interpénétration partielle de groupes sociaux aux frontières sans cesse fluctuantes. Selon Dewey, la démocratie participative correspond le mieux à la structure d'une société caractérisée par ce genre de multiculturalisme diffus. Les arguments de Dewey en faveur du multiculturalisme diffus et de la démocratie participative suscitaient l'admiration des philosophes pragmatistes ainsi que des libéraux, des progressistes, des socialistes, des pacifistes et des défenseurs du droit de vote des femmes, qui les reprenaient souvent. Comme son prédécesseur, Rorty demande que les membres d'une société démocratique adoptent tous le point de vue post-métaphysique du libéralisme ironique afin de bannir toute vision essentialiste de la nature humaine ou de la culture. Au contraire, la démocratie libérale fonctionne mieux si ses membres font simultanément allégeance à plusieurs instances, au groupes auxquels ils appartiennent prioritairement, à ceux qu'ils apprécient et à une société structurée de manière à permettre à tous d'en savourer la diversité.*

## Pragmatism Applied to Democracy

The most regrettable misunderstanding of pragmatism is the false view that pragmatism is a philosophical theory of truth. Pragmatists have offered several radical ideas about truth, and this radicalism earned pragmatism's fame. However, those ideas about truth are not a good starting place to consider pragmatism's value. Pragmatism is basically an empirical theory about intelligent learning in communities that produces real knowledge, knowledge of both nature and society. The pragmatists defended a close relationship between learning and democracy. This essay on pragmatism's heritage and legacy focuses on pragmatism's stance favoring pluralistic and participatory democracy. Pragmatism is also regrettably classified as a philosophy obsessed with mere power and means to power. This is also a bad distortion of pragmatism, but pragmatism would not be useful if it failed to deal with questions about the proper distribution of social and political power along with related issues of class, race, and gender.

Pragmatism can criticize the mistakes of public democracy, but at the same time pragmatism praises public democracy as the best form of government that has been invented at this time. Pragmatism additionally proposes a finer form of public democracy, with more citizen participation than mere voting, than any actual democracy. Pragmatism is judged to be highly idealistic when it appeals to a public democracy that does not yet exist anywhere. Rivals to public democracy can condemn public democracy for its mistakes, they can cast doubt on the value of increased citizen participation, and they can appeal to different views about human nature and social forces in order to criticize pragmatism. Pragmatism in response has had to find and apply sound anthropological and sociological theories for support of its views on pluralism in practice.

Pragmatists such as John Dewey and Richard Rorty defended the idea that public democracies are pragmatic theories in action, in two major senses. First, public democracy is a proposed method of social inquiry. When educated and communicating citizens make intelligent inquiries into their social conditions and changes to society, they are in a position to learn about how their society functions and how it can function differently. Democracy can produce social knowledge. Second, public democracy is itself an experimental test of the political proposition that citizens become more powerful over the conditions of life if their society becomes more and more democratic. Democracy can produce freer citizens. Pragmatism is demonstrably false if public democracy fails to increase social knowledge and fails to produce freer citizens. These two pragmatic tests of pragmatism are made in the actual experiments of free public democracy, in the same way that pragmatism is tested through the actual successes of free scientific

inquiry into nature. During the twentieth century, cultural pluralism and especially race pluralism challenged pragmatism to prove its value for democracy in practice.

Although pragmatism as a philosophy dates back to Charles S. Peirce in the 1870s, pragmatism's application to difficult social and political problems was developed later during the 1920s and 1930s. During this era, America was divided between prioritizing the unity of the American nation over democracy, and prioritizing democracy over American unity. The first view expressed the belief that America and all Americans are strong and in control only if they are highly unified together by a common culture and common goals. The second view expressed the belief that Americans are strong and can control their lives only if they are free to be members of organized groups that succeed in the struggle for recognition and rights against other groups and against the government.

Pragmatism was confronted by a difficult question: does democracy increase the power and control of citizens when diversity and plurality is decreased to a minimum, or increased to a maximum? Is pluralism an obstacle, or a benefit, to the purposes of public democracy? Pragmatism decided to side with pluralism's benefits, but pragmatism had to justify its calculations on the long-term benefits for increasing intelligence in democracy.

During the 1920s and 1930s, defenses of participatory and pluralistic democracy helped emerging social causes such as the pacifist, ethnic, labor, and civil rights efforts. Some pragmatists including John Dewey, Horace Kallen, Randolph Bourne, Jane Addams, and W. E. B. Du Bois took varying stances towards the war and how it was conducted. They were all concerned for the future of pluralism in America.

Du Bois took a pragmatic stance on the hopes for blacks in America, supporting black participation in the war effort and the U.S. military, hopeful that patriotic military service would bring positive credit. In an editorial titled "Returning Soldiers" appearing in the May 1919 issue of *Crisis*, Du Bois sustained his fighting mood: "Make way for Democracy! We saved it in France, and by the Great Jehovah, we will save it in the United States in America, or know the reason why." Du Bois immediately confronted an opposed view of how democracy works best. Confidence in the notion that the only America is the dominant white America was at an all-time high. Former President Theodore Roosevelt addressed a meeting of the Knights of Columbus in 1915, saying that the "only man who is a good American is the man who is an American and nothing else." (Akam 47) This sort of statement was not really intended as an open invitation.

In 1916, John Dewey defended pluralism by praising a multiply-hyphenated American (discussed in a later section) and the hyphen remained highly controversial. In 1916, William Pickens, Dean at Morgan State and an

NAACP field secretary, said "the colored soldier and the masses of the race are still loyal. There is no hyphen in the short word 'Negro': he is every inch American; he is not even Afro-American." (Foley 20) Who is the real American? What suffices as a criterion for being a real American? Those using the term "American" retain the privilege of defining it for themselves. Roosevelt, and Wilson, and Coolidge, and Harding, were not ready to include blacks, even hyphenated African-Americans. In 1919 Wilson declared that a "hyphen" is "the most un-American thing in the world." (Foley 137)

## The Solidarity and Power of Social Groups

An alternative to the hyphen remained available, of course, an old and familiar option of separate black unity. Blacks in America could be consolidated together through some positive common bond. Perhaps there is a way to unite blacks as a race in some biological sense, or in a cultural sense, or in a spiritual sense, or in a religious sense. The dangers of speaking of "race" were painfully obvious all along, since to even speak of an identifiable race only repeats a crucial category for racism. Nevertheless, a crucial category such as race can have an objectively powerful reality in social conditions where virulent and unrelenting racism seem to forever forbid any equality or integration.

Biological racism is not based on facts visible to natural science, but social science must deal with belief in race, as potent a force in the human world as any other energy. The social sciences must speak of "race" and therefore they require definitions of the concept of "race" and empirical criteria for detecting belief in race. Fulfilling these general needs is hard enough, but when social science is additionally asked to recommend practical programs of specific reform, race can become as concretized as any natural reality. Who are the people suffering under bigoted oppression, and needing the relief of social and political reform? Social science deals best with large social groups, and so does democracy. Reform in a democracy automatically confronts a terrible paradox: while a republic is democratic to the extent that each person's rights are promised, any lone individual is virtually powerless to force the State to deliver on those promises. Democracy in theory may see only weak individuals in their tiny minority, but democracy in practice only recognizes strong groups reaching towards a majority. The cold reality of social forces is that there really is strength in numbers.

If genuine social equality for individuals in a democracy can be most effectively gained by an identifiable unified group, and if social science is asked to supply the theoretical ground for such solidarity, then social science can construct a useful social category. Social science does not have to do

this work; as science, it could reply that it cannot recognize any clear social distinctiveness among oppressed people, just as biology cannot recognize any clear genetic distinctiveness among any large population. But if social science does try to locate a social group, it must look to the actual social relationships holding among people. For example, here is Du Bois's definition of the term "race": "It is a vast family of human beings, generally of common blood and language, always of common history, traditions and impulses, who are both voluntarily and involuntarily striving together for the accomplishment of certain more or less vividly conceived ideals of life." (Du Bois, "Conservation" 21) Du Bois's definition of race might equally well be used to briefly define a "culture" or even a "civilization." Such a broad definition can serve a narrow practical goal: a vast multitude can find common bonds of both past history and future potential.

Du Bois then went on to speak of the "souls of black folk" which aspire to spiritual and cultural achievements, making a valuable contribution as "a co-worker in the kingdom of culture."

> *The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife,—this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face.* (Souls 4)

When Du Bois appeals to terms such as "race" and "soul" and "blood," it can sound something like the racial essentialism refuted by biological fact. Yet Du Bois is not rooting the needed commonality in any actual organic fact, but rather the social realm of shared experience over generations. That shared experience is multi-faceted and multi-perspectival, a genuine plurality having numerous interconnections but no pure core.

This experiential logic of cultural pluralism that inspires Du Bois's thought is heard in additional pragmatist voices familiar during that era; from Jane Addams and Horace Kallen to Alain Locke and Randolph Bourne. Behind these voices are their teachers, William James, Josiah Royce, and John Dewey, who forged pluralistic sociologies and metaphysics using the insights of Hegelian historicism and philosophy of consciousness and freedom, Humboldt's "holistic individualism," Herder's notion of a folk "cultural genius," and nascent cultural anthropology advocated by Franz Boas enlightened by Darwin's theory of statistical drift of all populations over time. The ethos of cultural pluralism translates into the pragmatic politics of a pluralistic democracy. This pluralistic democracy is not any sort of simplistic "multi"-culturalism, as if a democratic society were

decomposable into distinct subgroups having no overlap and little in common with each other. The logic of cultural pluralism is not predicated on any deep essential commonality within every member of a group—rather, the people themselves, in their choices of social interactions and sharing experiences, create and compose a group. Because people are busily choosing their social interactions, within prevailing conditions of opportunity, there is no definite cultural boundary at the thin edges where overlap with other groups dominates, and any thick central aspect only constantly shifts over time.

Can a mass of people having only diverse plural interrelationships over time sustain the sort of social solidarity and force needed for democratic activism? It can seem much easier to assume a cultural essentialism grounding a group. However, cultural essentialism is internally self-contradictory, by promising greater power at the price of sacrificing freedom. This trade-off runs counter to the basic principles of democracy, which promise greater power through greater freedom.

Cultural essentialism differs from cultural pluralism by restricting a group's membership to only those who entirely participate in exclusively one culture. Multiculturalism is notoriously torn between two rival versions, two logically extreme versions: a multiculturalism of mutually exclusive groups contained like marbles within one jar of society, or a multiculturalism of partially interpenetrating, overlapping, and constantly shifting groups composing society. The choice between an essentialist multiculturalism or a diffuse multiculturalism is not merely a theoretical choice between abstract visions of pluralism. The practical choice, the political choice, can be determined in favor of essentialist multiculturalism because it can supply strong, stable, and strident political strength for a group, if the group will pull together. Yet logic is not desire. What motivates a multitude, a potential group, to pull together and to unite under a single culture?

This problem of motivation cannot be solved by any kind of essentialism. Any suggested source of this needed motivation only fallaciously presupposes the prior existence of the unified group. In the face of possible extinction, essentialism dogmatically emphasizes the unrelenting peril of harsh racism and rigidly defines who is necessarily a group member, tempting cultural essentialism to mutate back into segregationalism, nationalism, militancy, and even biological racism again. This is the first paradox of essentialist power: any actual success in moderating racism only diminishes and weakens the group. It remains a social fact that a group's magnitude and strength must naturally be proportional to the actual dedicated energy of its constituent members. For cultural essentialism, people get categorized first and their presumed dedication and energy to their assigned group are assumed to automatically follow. The second paradox of essentialist power has also been so widely noticed that we only need to mention it here:

people within essentialist cultural groups are expected to be so tightly bound to that culture's one way of life that freedoms to communicate and associate with other groups are strictly limited or even forbidden. The strength of the essentialist group is inversely proportional, in theory, to the personal liberties of its members; the stronger the group, the weaker any individual member.

There is a different understanding of social forces, a pragmatist understanding of the strength of unifying and unified social groups, that does not result in these twin essentialist paradoxes. This pragmatist understanding of social force does not dictate to people who they really must be, but only reminds people of who they are freely trying to be. If there is black power, for example, it exists in the lives of actual blacks living their lives in America. We have heard Du Bois's eloquent call for American blacks to forge better and truer selves in the lived experience of shared opportunity. Alain Locke, the black philosopher at Howard University who also studied at Harvard with William James and Josiah Royce, similarly regarded race as a social definition and viewed culture as something created anew in experience. Locke states that "We must consider race not in the fascist, blood-clan sense, which also is tribal and fetishist, but consider race as a common culture and brotherhood." (Harris 197-198)

For Locke, as for Du Bois, any genuinely pluralistic society must be composed of pluralistic individuals—pluralism and diversity must go all the way down to psychology and motivation. Locke's celebration of *The New Negro* (Locke) in 1925 proceeds from this sort of diffuse pluralism, as does his 1942 essay "Who and What is Negro?" in which he says, "There is, in brief, no 'The Negro'." (Harris 210; Harris and Molesworth) If yet another first-rank intellectual should be called forth in support of diffuse multiculturalism, we may invoke Martin Luther King, Jr. King was also steeped in the Hegelian and pragmatic pluralism of the Boston personalists (Deats & Robb) and he borrowed the phrase "Beloved Community" from Royce. In *Stride Toward Freedom*, King says that Hegel's analysis of the dialectical process taught him that "Growth comes through struggle." In his book *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos Or Community?* King writes,

> *The Negro is the child of two cultures—Africa and America. The problem is that in the search for wholeness all too many Negroes seek to embrace only one side of their natures. Some, seeking to reject their heritage, are ashamed of their color, ashamed of black art and music, and determine what is beautiful and good by the standards of white society. They end up frustrated and without cultural roots. Others seek to reject everything American and to identify totally with Africa, even to the point of wearing African clothes. But this approach leads also to frustration because the American Negro is not an African. The old Hegelian synthesis still offers the best answer to many of life's dilemmas. The American Negro is neither totally African nor totally western. He is Afro-American, a true hybrid, a combination of two cultures.* (King 588)

The Hegelian synthesis mentioned by King is a social synthesis of strength through shared experience. The bloodless dialectic of Hegelian categories is alive in the dynamic interactions among shifting social groups.

Hegel himself is no longer a reliable guide to the Darwinian dynamics of interpenetrating social groups that characterize such a pluralistic society as America. For an appropriately updated Hegelian approach, we can turn to a twentieth-century American philosopher, John Dewey, who inspired so much of the pluralist revolt against the elitist hegemony of white America.

## John Dewey, Pluralism, and Public Democracy

Dewey elevated Kallen's criticism of the Melting Pot to a higher level by advocating what has been labeled here as diffuse multiculturalism, in his 1916 speech on "Nationalizing Education" to the National Education Association of the United States.

> *Such terms as Irish-American or Hebrew-American or German-American are false terms because they seem to assume something which is already in existence called America, to which the other factor may be externally hitched on. The fact is, the genuine American, the typical American, is himself a hyphenated character. This does not mean that he is part American and that some foreign ingredient is then added. It means that, as I have said, he is international and interracial in his make-up. He is not American plus Pole or German. But the American is himself Pole-German-English-French-Spanish-Italian-Greek-Irish-Scandavian-Bohemian-Jew and so on. The point is to see to it that the hyphen connects instead of separates.*
>
> (Gordon 139)

Not only should subgroups not assimilate, there is no prior monochrome "America" to which they could assimilate. The only genuine sociological fact is that American people do take opportunities to share in each other's cultural experiences. Education can begin to be democratic by teaching this sociological fact. Education in America is nationalistic only to the extent that it recognizes this pluralistic and international character of the experience of being an American. Neither education nor philosophy can demonstrate that a pluralistic society is intrinsically better. There is no a priori reasoning for pluralism, or for homogeneity. Only the actual situation of cultural pluralism, and the situation of people enjoying some degree of cultural pluralism, provides the context for public philosophy.

Dewey was happily watching America become more diverse, and he suffered no romantic longings for simpler rural America. During the 1920s immigration slowed, but by 1935 John Dewey's City of New York was about 50% Catholic, 30% Jewish, and 17% Protestant. Of course Dewey had already personally witnessed some multiculturalism in his booming hometown of Burlington, Vermont, and then the turbulent immigrant

pluralism in Chicago of the 1880s and 1890s. Dewey, as America's foremost defender of democracy, viewed the challenge of cultural pluralism as an opportunity for America to reconsider the nature and possibilities of freedom. By 1919 Dewey felt keenly disappointed, as so many Progressives did, with Wilson, Wilson's disregard for civil liberties, and the confused aftermath of the War. Dewey had called for equal opportunity and integration of blacks for many years and supported the formation of the NAACP and the ACLU.

Dewey applied diffuse multiculturalism to transcend cultural essentialism's paradoxes of power by taking the sociological stance that people most effectively organize over common current problems, not the past. Appeals to the past, in the form of blood kinship or ethnic heritage, are heard most stridently at the precise moment when a people are threatened by contemporary emergencies of oppression or exploitation. Social strength arises from motivated people who find common cause for proactively dealing with some present-day situation. People freely pursuing their own chosen ends can be highly motivated people; they can discover their common cause through free and open communication; and they can associate in numbers to try to change their social situation for the better in a free society rather than a repressive society. People who can freely associate into interest groups are taking advantage of freedoms and can successful increase their freedoms. There is no paradoxical diminishment of freedom when associating for strength on this highly pluralistic view of social groupings.

Participatory democracy, according to Dewey, makes the best political fit with a diffusely multicultural society. A diffusely multicultural society is composed of individuals who identify with one or more communities of their choice. If these individuals additionally prefer to live in a society in which all people have the same opportunity to participate in whatever communities they choose, then they will endorse a political order than best sustains that free opportunity for all. That political order is going to be something like liberal democracy. Democracy is essentially the peaceful and thoughtful effort to justly provide freedoms and opportunities among persons, and therefore it is a type of non-violent conflict resolution. Furthermore, this liberal democracy will encourage a high level of citizen participation in political deliberations. This additional Deweyan claim about participation requires far more justification than merely recommending liberal democracy.

It is a mere platitude to say that democracy works well when citizens are well-educated and civic-minded. Yet such a democracy, made secure by a strong constitution, need not be a highly participatory democracy. Dewey sustained an abiding concern for not merely the education and intelligence of the masses, but specifically for the peoples' capacity to participate in

group problem-solving about social conflicts. Dewey labels this capacity as "organized intelligence" or "social intelligence." Dewey does not assume the prior existence of a cohesive community or some idealized social fellowship fostering democracy. Quite the opposite: in Hegelian fashion, Dewey only presumes that people associate to further their interests and these groups cause social conflict by intentionally or unintentionally obstructing the interests of others.

> *Of course, there are conflicting interests; otherwise there would be no social problems. The problem under discussion is precisely how conflicting claims are to be settled in the interest of the widest possible contribution to the interests of all—or at least of the great majority. The method of democracy—inasfar as it is that of organized intelligence—is to bring these conflicts out into the open where their special claims can be seen and appraised, where they can be discussed and judged in the light of more inclusive interests than are represented by either of them separately. [...] [W]hat generates violent strife is failure to bring the conflict into the light of intelligence where the conflicting interests can be adjudicated in behalf of the interest of the great majority.* (Dewey 11, 56)

The question is not whether social conflict could be ideally prevented—it never can be prevented—but only whether there are intelligent means of dealing with social conflict. The more intelligent means would satisfy the twin aims of the people themselves: to enjoy free association among social groups, and to enjoy an entire society in which others have the same freedom. Dewey found in social intelligence the resources to reply to the oft-made accusation that decisions by majority rule are only rarely and coincidentally the wisest course. For Dewey, public conflict resolution is typically improved as more citizens are involved in its deliberations.

Although Dewey calls for democracy to be more intelligent, many Dewey commentators have complained that he offers no pragmatic theory of the actual "machinery" of democratic deliberation. Perhaps they get distracted by Dewey's own clumsy political activities and forget to look for political theory in his writings. It is at least clear that Dewey did not intend to hand over the government to expert intellectual elites, unlike many critics such as Walter Lippmann. Lippmann derided participatory democracy in his books, particularly *The Phantom Public* (1925), describing ordinary citizens as too ignorant, apathetic, and selfish to be capable of helping to govern for the public good. Dewey's political theory answers each of these charges made against citizens.

The method of intelligence, according to Dewey, is first and foremost the logical process of problem-solving. Confidence in democracy is therefore confidence in the intelligence of citizens to resolve social conflicts.

> *Democracy is a way of personal life controlled not merely by faith in human nature in general but by faith in the capacity of human beings for intelligent judgment and*

> *action if proper conditions are furnished. [...] For what is the faith of democracy in the role of consultation, of conference, of persuasion, of discussion, in formation of public opinion, which in the long run is self-corrective, except faith in the capacity of the intelligence of the common man to respond with commonsense to the free play of facts and ideas which are secured by effective guarantees of free inquiry, free assembly and free communication?* (Dewey 14, 226-227)

Dewey's theory of participatory democracy has pragmatic stages of *public inquiry*, according to Dewey's *The Public and Its Problems* (1927). (1) A number of people become collectively aware that they suffer from the same social problem, and if they have sufficient interest and energy to work together on this problem, they form a "public." (2) This new public, perhaps with the aid of social scientists, survey social conditions to identify which are probably responsible. (3) Hypotheses are formulated by this public, perhaps in alliance with other publics, to suggest what modifications to social structures and/or norms may alleviate the social problem. (4) If persuaded, a majority of the Public (the whole body of citizens) agrees to experiment with one of the proposed social modifications, pressures branches of local, state, and/or federal government to implement the modifications, and the experiment's consequences are observed. (5) The social problem is either alleviated sufficiently so that the public loses energy/members, or the process returns to stage two.

Both processes of inquiry presuppose some degree of community goodwill and respect for all participants, even as these processes encourage fierce competition between subgroup aims. This is the essence of democratic polyarchy: Political power is distributed over many energetic publics competing for community and government attention to their aims (such as ethnic associations, civic action organizations, political parties, religious organizations, businesses, unions, political action committees, trade groups, grassroots community groups, charities, etc.) Furthermore, both processes of inquiry assume the existence of routes of communication for sustaining the community over the long run and for supporting the emergence of new publics to compete with each other over the short run.

Robert Dahl proposed the term "polyarchy" (Dahl) as a label for a society with political structures and norms that protected fair and effective competition among political active citizens and their organized groups. Dewey's theory of political democracy could be labeled "public deliberation polyarchy." Dewey does agree with Dahl that a genuine democracy will facilitate the uprising of activist and protest groups, what Lippmann and Dewey labeled as "publics," by providing conditions for easy communication, free association, and honest media information. Furthermore, a genuine democracy will provide the sort of civic education that (1) fosters mutual respect and appreciation for all members of society, and (2) teaches the skills of collective problem-solving. If a

democracy can meet these minimal requirements, then those publics that do arise can frequently get a fair hearing before the entire community—the Public. Such a democratic society would also be more resistant to authoritarian temptations, which critics of liberal democracy fear would be irresistible to an undereducated and apathetic populace.

Against Lippmann's charge of citizen ignorance, Dewey answers that organized publics can be very intelligent, especially when many intellectuals work for them. Against the charge of apathy, Dewey answers that members of publics can be highly motivated, especially when they see evidence that their time, energy, and money is making a difference. Against the charge of selfishness, Dewey expects that citizens who demand that their suffering be recognized also be capable of caring about the suffering of others (here again civic education is crucial), so that publics and the citizens that make up the Public can view the democratic process as a potential win-win situation and not as a zero-sum game. Dewey's specific preferred form of democracy, what has been here termed "public deliberation polyarchy," describes how social conflicts can be managed by citizens for maintaining what Dewey called the Great Community. A democracy's citizens, educated in the civic tools of social intelligence, can be effective at peacefully managing their social conflicts.

For Dewey's understanding of the proper functioning of democracy, the freedoms of communication and association have supreme priority. These foundational freedoms are not merely negative limitations on state action; they are positive goods for the life and health of any democracy. The social life of diffuse multiculturalism presumes that all people have the opportunity to enjoy their cultural allegiances and modify them over the course of their lifetimes. The political life of participatory democracy, the kind of government most intelligently preferred by a diffusely multicultural society, similarly presumes that all people have the right to communicate and associate freely in order to gather and wield the social strength in numbers to engage other groups in the public sphere of deliberation.

Dewey's arguments favoring diffuse multiculturalism and participatory democracy were widely admired and repeated by philosophical pragmatists and by politically active liberals, progressives, socialists, pacifists, advocates of women's suffrage, and defenders of ethnic civil rights and liberties. However, the late 1910s and 1920s proved to be a time when respect for constitutional freedoms, especially freedom of speech, dropped to historically low levels. Dewey argued that if the capacity for free speech and association leads people to organize collectively along labor or ethnic lines for economic advantage, their pragmatic success exposes economic individualism as mere class ideology. However, the Supreme Court slowly arrived at strong protections for free speech. Only when Justices Holmes and Brandeis

gradually began to articulate their own versions of the pragmatic and progressive justifications for the primacy of free speech can we see the beginning of modern civil liberties jurisprudence. Dewey's pragmatist approach to justifying democratic liberties began to be heard in Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr.'s statement that the Constitution "is an experiment, as all life is an experiment" in his dissent in *Abrams v United States* in 1919 and his endorsement of "the free trade in ideas" in *Gitlow v New York* in 1925. In *Gitlow*, the Court for the first time held that the Fourteenth Amendment applied the First Amendment to the states, and this smoothed the way for more robust protection of free speech in the 1930s and 1940s.

## Richard Rorty on Freedom and Democracy

Like Dewey, Rorty denies that any natural fact about human beings could be used as foundations for the "correct" or "ideal" political government. The natural facts that humans use stable associations over generations, and that these associations can conflict, only explains why the idea of government eventually arose.

The turbulent realm of the civil society can too easily be contrasted by a peaceful vision of a political state. The state indeed seeks conflict management, but the process of politics cannot be dictated by principles having some other origin than civil society. Appeals to "original sin" or "human nature" or "natural rights" or "pure reason" only perpetuate metaphysical fantasies, fantasies that Rorty has continually rejected. The Enlightenment was not wrong to blame entrenched intellectual traditions for enslaving the mind and body, but too many Enlightenment figures challenged tradition by erecting new metaphysical structures. Living human intelligence, not transcendental Reason, is sufficient in the long run for political freedom. A pragmatist does not use metaphysics to justify permanent laws dictating the limits of freedom. A pragmatist wants increased freedom for everyone to inquire into justifications for current laws so that modified laws might further increase freedoms into the future.

In "Education as Socialization and Individuation," Rorty agrees with the further Deweyan point that education must not teach old metaphysical or political "truths," but only educate for public deliberation about new ideas. Rorty writes,

> *Dewey put a new twist on the idea that if you take care of freedom, truth will take care of itself. [...] He taught us to call "true" whatever belief results from a free and open encounter of opinions, without asking whether this agrees with something beyond that encounter. [...] Instead of justifying democratic freedoms by reference to an account of human nature and the nature of reason, Dewey takes the desire to preserve and expand such freedoms as a starting point—something we*

> *need not look behind. Instead of saying that free and open encounters track truth by permitting a mythical faculty called "reason" to function unfettered, he says simply that we have no better criterion of truth than that it is what results from such encounters* (Rorty, Social Hope 119)

There is no universal Reason to track correspondence to God's Word, the structure of reality, the essence of humanity, or the dictates of pure logic. We can only learn from each other, if free communication provides opportunities.

A democratic society can only become educated about democracy through its own collective experience and the experience of similar societies. A democracy can justify its practices, and modifications to those practices, by intelligent inquiry into how democracies work. A democracy has no separate means of justifying democracy to non-democratic cultures. Non-democratic cultures can learn how democracies work and they occasionally are persuaded to experiment with a little democracy, but Rorty readily admits that democracy has no "knock-down" rational argument justifying democracy over all other forms of government.

Dewey does think that there is a complex argument, more of a sociological argument, justifying democracy. If we understand the proper function of government as conflict management for the general good, then democracy can justify its superiority through its practical successes at these aims. Rorty would not disagree with this pragmatic approach to justifying democracy. Rorty only reminds us that no philosophical master argument is available to prove anything about the proper function of government.

Rorty additionally asks that members of a democratic society all take the post-metaphysical standpoint of liberal ironism. This request seems reasonable, if Rorty is correct about metaphysics. Within a democratic society, some people may still be tempted to appeal to transcendent matters, especially if they judge that their own interests can be advanced. Miniature metaphysics flower from subgroups in a society who justify their priorities by appealing to their own worldview. Biological, cultural, and religious essentialisms are prominent examples. If Rorty doesn't want anyone to rely on metaphysics anymore, it makes sense that he would ask every member of every subgroup to abandon metaphysics too. This demand raises tough questions. Is society-wide liberalism consistent with pluralism? How liberal is a democracy that cannot tolerate diverse subgroups disagreeing about worldviews and values?

Liberal democracy can function even though many subgroups retain metaphysical commitments. Indeed, many philosophers understand the primary function of liberal democracy as the accommodation of robust internal diversity. The paradox that liberal democracy requires a comprehensive worldview to compete with those of its subgroups was

traditionally resolved by claims that liberal democracy's worldview is metaphysically superior (more "rational," "universalizable," etc.) Dewey, Rorty, and other pragmatists must instead find a way of respecting "deep pluralism" through an equally "deep democracy." (Green) Liberal democracy had become excessively fixated on rationalized political justice between citizens, or groups of citizens, having no presumed intimacy with each other.

Again, the recognition of the option of diffuse multiculturalism is helpful at this point. A liberal democracy is not forced to resort to metaphysics if it is not asked to manage citizen atomism or subgroup essentialisms. Liberal democracy works better if its members instead have multiple loyalties: loyalty to one's own primary subgroup(s), loyalty to other subgroups that one also enjoys, and loyalty to a society that permits everyone to share in the society's diversity. Selves are not only "encumbered" but multiply encumbered with multi-group relations. Genuine individuality arises naturally from internal diversity, a unique diversity manifested by those multiple social relations deliberately sustained by an individual. Loyalties can simultaneously operate on several levels without any formal contradictions, even while the conflicts of civil society ensue. Royce's moral notion of "loyalty to loyalty" energizes his theory of an ethical democracy. We see the same notion in Dewey's moral vision of the Great Community, and Rorty has also discovered the power of loyalty for democracy.

Rorty asks us to place communal loyalty ahead of political justice, or rather, to view "Justice as a Larger Loyalty."

> *[B]eing rational and acquiring a larger loyalty are two descriptions of the same activity. This is because* any *unforced agreement between individuals and groups about what to do creates a form of community, and will, with luck, be the initial stage in expanding the circles of those whom each party to the agreement had previously taken to be "people like ourselves." The opposition between rational argument and fellow-feeling thus begins to dissolve.*
>
> (Rorty, Cultural Politics 53)

Rorty goes on to explain how, unlike the strict terms of political justice, the bonds of loyalty and mutual trust have sizes and degrees, spread out over varying sets of human beings, and gradually grow under favorable conditions. Only where there is already some degree of fellowship, of loyalty, would people find formal reasons for political relations to be persuasive or useful.

Once again, pragmatism displays its departure from classical liberal politics. The "contract" theory that democracy can work even where people who hate each other could justify rules and rights cannot strictly be proven false, but history cannot confirm it. Mutual recognition and respect cannot be induced by calculating reason, as Hegel explained long ago; rationality and community are organically fused. The understanding spirit of civic

community grows of itself, or not at all. Nor does democracy require some other human "faculty" for its essentialist foundation; the pragmatists are Hegelian, not Kantian. Royce, Dewey, and Rorty are not twentieth-century romantics simply replacing cold reason with warm emotion. In the real world of civic life, people are neither related exclusively by external contacts of contractual convenience, nor exclusively related by essentialist bonds of monochrome unity. Communing flourishes across the broad range marked out by such extremes.

Loyalty is more or less diffuse. The diffusion of loyalty marks out where overlapping groups of people are sharing and cooperating. People decide to cooperate and trust first, and then politicize their mutual practices second, if at all. Put bluntly, people do not base their trust on a contract; people make contracts within a larger social context of mutual trust. Rationalized politics must follow some established loyalty, not the reverse. Trusting loyalty is the human mode of life partially fusing the moral realm together with the political realm. Transcending any moral/political dichotomy, long sought by pragmatic pluralists, has a central role in Rorty's own hope for expanding the "spirit" of democracy in advance of enlarging the "law" of democracy. We cannot rationally justify our government to all others; our ethnocentric reasons are not so easily "universalizable." If democracy can spread, it is only because our democratic spirit reaches out to all and clasps the hands of any who wants to build a good relationship. We do not have to commune with those unwilling or unable to meet our minimal moral requirements (and we don't have to start wars with them either). But we can tolerate and cooperate with those quite different from us, where we have hopes of encouraging respect for human dignity and opportunity.

This spirit of democracy, what Dewey called democracy's cultural "way of life" and what Rorty called "a larger loyalty" (echoing Royce's "loyalty to loyalty"), serves as the reasonable bridge of potential cooperation and partial trust long before any formally democratic machinery gets involved. Within one country, subgroups can appreciate a democratic culture that fosters their peaceful co-existence. Between countries, cooperative ventures and alliances based on the spirit of democracy can foster peace even if neither country has a democratic government. Political democracy can serve as an additional technology of mutual respect and trust to increase free communication, strengthen bridges, and further reduce the chances of violent conflict. The logical, if not always temporal, process of democracy is rooted in open communication and grows through free communing towards chosen solidarity and intelligent politics.

For pragmatists, politics can be ethical, if we understand peoples' communal lives. Democracy is reasonably universalizable if we can see how democracy grows in historical experience under favorable conditions.

## Conclusion

Political institutions and laws only can be justified pragmatically within the life of a democratic society, not by any appeal beyond society or beyond human existence altogether. Freedoms and rights can be grown internally within the life of a civil society, even one challenged by dramatic pluralism. Pluralism is not a threat to liberty—pluralism is an opportunity to understand the meaning and value of freedom, and an opportunity to increase freedoms.

Looking back on the organizing and constitutional struggles which emerged in 1919, we are reminded how those who challenge the American status quo most urgently need the right to free speech and the other basic civil liberties. Indeed, if the Hegelian/Deweyan analysis of democracy's foundations is sound, there can be no robust civil rights without equally robust civil liberties. An individual's capacity to demand and possess civil rights is proportional to that individual's liberty to communicate and organize with others for effective political activism. For pragmatism, social intelligence, social organizing, and social power are tightly and effectively linked in a genuine democracy.

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