

## A Farewell to Deweyan Democracy

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The revival of pragmatism has brought renewed enthusiasm for John Dewey's conception of democracy. Drawing upon Rawlsian concerns regarding the fact of reasonable pluralism, I argue that Deweyan democracy is unworthy of resurrection. A modified version of Deweyan democracy recently proposed by Elizabeth Anderson is then taken up and also found to be lacking. Then I propose a model of democracy that draws upon Peirce's social epistemology. The result is a non-Deweyan but nonetheless pragmatist option in democratic theory.

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There is renewed enthusiasm among political theorists for John Dewey's conception of democracy.<sup>1</sup> I argue here that Dewey's democratic theory is nonviable. The argument draws from Rawlsian concerns about pluralism. I contend that Deweyan democracy is inconsistent with reasonable pluralism and is thus oppressive in Rawls' sense. Yet my intent is not solely critical. After showing that Deweyan democracy is an inappropriate ideal for contemporary society, I sketch a non-Deweyan pragmatist conception of democracy that is viable.

The article proceeds in three parts. The first part identifies the central commitments of Deweyan democracy and then argues that Deweyan democracy cannot countenance reasonable pluralism. Then I show that this inability is a *pragmatic* failure; Deweyan democracy fails on its own terms. The broader conclusion is that unless there is a viable non-Deweyan pragmatist view of democracy, pragmatists must face the ironic result that they cannot devise a compelling political theory.

The second part of the article examines Elizabeth Anderson's (2006; 2009) reinterpretation of Deweyan democracy. I argue that although Anderson's version of Deweyan democracy omits many of the problematic commitments of Dewey's own articulations, her view either nonetheless inherits the same problems or else is not distinctively Deweyan. We again confront the possibility that there is no viable pragmatist option in democratic theory.

I argue in the third part that Peircean epistemology can be employed in the development of a new pragmatist conception of democracy which avoids the problems of Deweyan democracy. I conclude that pragmatists who want to theorize democracy must be Peirceans.

### The Trouble with Deweyan Democracy

#### *What Deweyan Democracy Is*

The first order of business is to characterize the view I intend to criticize. I propose the following four interlocking theses as constitutive of Deweyan democracy:

- (1) *The Continuity Thesis*: The democratic political order is a moral order characterized by a distinctive conception of human flourishing.
- (2) *The Transformative Thesis*: The democratic process is one in which individual preferences, attitudes and opinions are informed and transformed rather than simply aggregated.
- (3) *The Way of Life Thesis*: Democracy is not simply a kind of state or a mode of government, but a way of life.
- (4) *The Perfectionist Thesis*: Democratic states may enact legislation and design institutions for the expressed purpose of fostering the values and attitudes necessary for human flourishing.

I will explicate these in order.

First, Deweyan democracy rejects the ‘old-time separation between politics and morals’ (Dewey, 1969–91, MW12: 192)<sup>2</sup> common to most current forms of liberalism, opting instead for the view that politics and ethics are *continuous*.<sup>3</sup> Dewey holds that democracy is the political manifestation of his social conception of the self and its corresponding ethics of self-realization. That is, according to Dewey, human individuals are not ‘given’ prior to socialization (EW1: 231; LW2: 299; LW7: 227), but emerge out of social interaction; hence ‘what an individual actually is depends upon the nature and movement of associated life’ (LW6:5; compare MW12: 193; LW11: 31), the ‘human being is an individual because of and in relation to others’ (LW7: 227; compare MW12: 191).<sup>4</sup> Consequently, Dewey identifies a ‘moral criterion’ for evaluating ‘social institutions and political measures’: ‘The test is whether a given custom or law sets free individual capacities in such a way as to make them available for the developments of the general happiness or the common good’ (MW5: 431; compare MW9: 88ff.; MW12: 186).

According to Dewey, only a democratic order can fare favorably on such a test, for democracy is ‘the idea of community life itself’, the ‘clear consciousness of a communal life, in all its implications’ (LW2: 328). It is through membership and participation in a democratic community that individuals can develop their capacities in ways that enrich the life of the whole (MW10: 233; LW7: 350; LW13: 303); democratic community ‘is the endeavor to unite’ the ‘liberation of individuals on the one hand’ and the ‘promotion of a common good on the other’ (LW7: 349), it is the project of ‘mutually enhancing self-realization’ (Caspary, 2000, 13). Since we are inherently social beings, our flourishing can be achieved only in community with others (MW12: 199; LW2: 331); accordingly, democracy is necessary ‘to achieve a truly human way of living’ (LW11: 218). Consequently, for the Deweyan, in so far as democracy needs a justification at all, its justification lies in its ability to facilitate human flourishing, what Dewey called ‘growth’ (LW7: 306; MW12: 181). Hence Dewey held that ‘Democracy and the one, ultimate, ethical ideal of humanity are ... synonyms’ (EW1: 248).

Second, Deweyan democracy adopts a view of democratic participation that is rooted in Dewey’s conception of growth. According to the Deweyan, participation in a democratic community is not simply a matter of voting, campaigning, canvassing, lobbying and petitioning in service of one’s preferences; rather, participation requires citizens to engage

in activities by which they may by free and open discussion ‘convince and be convinced by reason’ (MW10: 404). That is, Deweyan democracy rejects what Jane Mansbridge (1980) aptly characterizes as the ‘adversary’ model of democracy and favors a *transformative* view according to which democratic participation consists in applications of shared intelligence to social problems (LW11: 37; LW11: 25). When shared intelligence is enacted, conflicts are addressed in ways in which the competing claims can be brought ‘out into the open’ where ‘they can be discussed and judged in the light of more inclusive interests’ (LW11: 56); hence intelligence brings into relief ‘values prized in common’ (LW13: 71; LW2: 328).<sup>5</sup> Therefore the ‘give and take’ (LW2: 332) that is constitutive of democratic participation results in transformed or revised preferences and enlarged social perspectives. Democratic citizens engage in social processes of applying collective intelligence to shared problems and, in so doing, they grow.

Third, the Deweyan democrat is committed to the view that democracy is a way of life – a congeries of social norms, political institutions and personal habits and attitudes, aimed at growth and thus fit to govern ‘all modes of human association’ (LW2: 325). It should be noted that this third thesis follows neatly from the first two. If we concede that ‘growth itself is the only moral end’ (MW12: 181) and accept the Continuity Thesis, we will be disposed to evaluate all styles of human sociality according to their capacity to foster growth. If in addition we mean by *democracy* those social and personal habits and norms that explicitly aim at fostering growth, we will then follow Dewey in holding that democracy is misunderstood when taken as the name of a kind of state or system of government (LW2: 325). Democracy, rather, is the name of the political and personal aspiration to achieve ‘the all around growth of every member of society’ (MW12: 186). Accordingly, the Deweyan democrat sees democracy as a mode of sociality that should inform ‘all areas and ways of living’ (LW11: 25) and ‘must affect all modes of human association, the family, the school, industry, religion’ (LW2: 325).

Fourth, Deweyan democracy rejects the neutralism of contemporary democratic theory and adopts a kind of *perfectionism*. To be clear, the perfectionism I attribute to Dewey is not the view that there is a fixed and static human nature to be perfected; rather it is the view that political institutions should aim to foster within citizens the attitudes and habits requisite for human flourishing.<sup>6</sup> That Dewey is a perfectionist in this sense is clear; he holds that political institutions ‘are not means for obtaining something for individuals. They are means of *creating* individuals’ (MW12: 191, emphasis in original). As we saw in our discussion of the Way of Life Thesis, growth requires that individuals adopt and practice certain habits; accordingly, democracy is a ‘personal way of individual life’, one involving the ‘possession and continual use of certain attitudes, forming personal character and determining desire and purpose in all the relations of life’ (LW14: 226). A democratic society hence must strive to create democratic individuals by instituting policies and building institutions designed to call forth the habits and attitudes necessary for growth. In fact, Dewey contends that possession and exercise of the attitudes requisite for growth are necessary for personal freedom (LW3: 111), for ‘freedom for an individual means growth’ (MW12: 198). Thus it is not sufficient for a democratic state to serve the neutralist aim of protecting individuals from interference; it must govern in ways that

strive to cultivate and enable in citizens the habits constitutive of freedom (MW5: 392; LW2: 340; LW11: 220).

With these theses in place, two additional observations can be made. First, the Continuity Thesis and the Way of Life Thesis combine to generate a perfectionism that is more muscular than contemporary varieties. Whereas current versions of perfectionism hold that the task of cultivating the desired dispositions is a task for the state alone, Dewey holds that 'The struggle for democracy has to be maintained on as many fronts as culture has aspects: political, economic, international, educational, scientific and artistic, and religious' (LW13: 186).<sup>7</sup> Dewey saw the task of democracy to be that of 'making our own politics, industry, education, our culture generally, a servant and an evolving manifestation of democratic ideals' (LW13: 197). For Dewey, then, *all* social associations – not just the state – should be aimed at the realization of his distinctive vision of human flourishing.

Second, the theses taken together not only encourage a distinction between democracy as a form of government and democracy as a way of life (LW2: 325); they additionally imply that social democracy is normatively prior to political democracy. Dewey holds that the structures and practices of political democracy – free and frequent elections, universal suffrage, fair procedures and the rule of law, for example – are 'but a mechanism' for 'securing' the 'channels' by which the democratic social ideal could be realized (LW2: 325). 'Majority rule', he says, 'is as foolish as its critics charge it with being' if understood apart from the social conditions that would render it an effective instrument for growth (LW2: 365). That is, on Dewey's view, 'there is no sanctity' (LW2: 326) in the institutions of political democracy; they are 'devices' for achieving democracy as a way of life (LW2: 326). Hence 'democracy is a form of government only because it is a form of moral and spiritual association' (EW1: 240).

### *Pluralism and Democratic Theory*

John Rawls' idea of the 'fact of reasonable pluralism' (Rawls, 1996, p. 36), along with his *political* liberalism, is well known and does not require extended comment. The idea is this: there is no single comprehensive philosophical, religious or moral doctrine upon which reason converges, and there are several mutually incompatible doctrines that are nonetheless consistent with the core commitments of liberal democracy. Consequently, despite 'our conscious attempt to reason with each other' (Rawls, 1996, p. 55), agreement at the level of fundamental moral, religious and philosophical issues is elusive. Importantly, Rawls contends that reasonable pluralism 'is not a mere historical condition that may soon pass away' (Rawls, 1996, p. 36), but 'the long-run outcome of the work of human reason under enduring free institutions' (Rawls, 1996, p. 129). The liberties secured in a constitutional democracy give rise to reasonable pluralism.

The fact of reasonable pluralism entails the 'fact of oppression' (Rawls, 1996, p. 36). If reasonable pluralism is 'the inevitable outcome of free human reason', then 'a continuing shared understanding on one comprehensive religious, philosophical, or moral doctrine can be maintained only by the oppressive use of state power' (Rawls, 1996, p. 36). Where minds are free, pluralism prevails; where pluralism does not prevail, minds are not free.

When the fact of reasonable pluralism is combined with the core democratic commitment that the exercise of coercive political power is legitimate only if it is justifiable, at least in principle, ‘to every last individual’ (Waldron, 1993, p. 37), the result is that any political order that is premised upon the truth of a single comprehensive doctrine – even a perfectly democratic one – is oppressive. It is oppressive because it allows the coercion of reasonable citizens in the service of a comprehensive moral, philosophical or religious ideal that they could reasonably reject.

As an example, consider Joe the utilitarian. Joe thinks with Mill that the Greatest Happiness Principle (GHP) is ‘the ultimate appeal on all ethical questions’ (Mill, 1991 [1859], p. 15). Consequently, he thinks that any question of public policy or institutional design is decisively answered by the GHP. Suppose Joe also thinks, again with Mill, that a system of weighted voting, in which ‘graduates of universities’ are given ‘two or more votes’ (Mill, 1991 [1861], p. 336), best satisfies the GHP. Further stipulate that Joe is *correct* that weighted voting is required by the GHP. The fact of reasonable pluralism is the fact that utilitarianism is not the only reasonable moral doctrine that free citizens might adopt; one may reject utilitarianism without thereby revoking one’s fitness for democratic citizenship. In order to be legitimate, public policy must be justifiable to *all* citizens, even those who oppose utilitarianism as a moral theory. Consequently, Joe’s utilitarian reasons could be reasonably rejected; they are hence insufficient to publicly justify weighted voting.<sup>8</sup>

Crucially, Joe’s reasons are insufficient for public justification *even if* utilitarianism is true. The Rawlsian insight is that in order to be legitimate, public policy must be justifiable by reasons that meet a standard higher than truth; publicly justifying reasons must be not reasonably rejectable. The fact of reasonable pluralism means that no comprehensive doctrine is beyond reasonable rejection; therefore, reasons, such as Joe’s, which derive from a single comprehensive doctrine – again, even a reasonable one – cannot publicly justify. In order to publicly justify weighted voting in a democratic society, Joe must appeal to reasons that even non-utilitarians could accept. Rawls concludes that ‘no comprehensive doctrine is appropriate as a political conception for a constitutional regime’ (Rawls, 1996, p. 135); therefore, a ‘well-ordered democratic society’ is not a community, if by ‘community’ we mean ‘a special kind of association, one united by a comprehensive doctrine’ (Rawls, 1996, p. 40).

### ***How Deweyan Democracy Fails***

Deweyan democracy fails because it claims that proper democracy is a community in the Rawlsian sense.<sup>9</sup> Dewey held that the democratic way of life required the transformation of society into a Great Community (LW2: 350) rooted in ‘vital, steady, and deep relationships’ (LW2: 369) based in shared ‘signs and symbols’ (LW2: 330) and ‘conjoint experience’ (LW2: 331). Deweyan democrats envision a political world in which ‘all modes of human association’ (LW2: 325) are organized around the ongoing task of realizing growth. Accordingly, they see proper democracy as a matter not simply of how a society or group makes its collective decisions, but also of *what it decides*. For a society’s policies shape the habits of its citizens, and democracy is the project of creating a certain kind of individual. Thus

collective decision making should increasingly reflect the aim of furthering growth; consequently, a society that is *not* directed towards growth is a society that is failing at democracy.<sup>10</sup>

My argument is not that Deweyan democrats long for a monochrome society of convinced Deweyans. The point is rather that Deweyan democracy is a community in the Rawlsian sense in so far as it takes its own conception of human flourishing to be sufficient for deciding how public institutions should be designed and what policies would be best to enact. That is, Deweyans hold that to show that some public policy *P* is the best among available options for promoting growth is to provide a conclusive reason for enacting *P*. Crucially, Deweyans also hold that for a society not to enact *P* even after it has been shown to best further growth is for that society to fail at democracy; for growth provides the 'criterion' (MW5: 431), 'standard' (MW9: 89) or 'supreme test' (MW12: 186) for democracy. That is, Deweyan democrats hold that, for a society to be properly democratic, the truth of the claim '*P* best promotes growth among the available options' should be sufficient to justify publicly the enactment of *P*; to fail to enact the policy that would best promote growth is not only to choose a non-optimal policy, it is to fail at democracy.

This reading of the commitments of Deweyan democracy is confirmed in the work of contemporary Dewey scholars. A full examination cannot be attempted here. I will limit myself to three scholars who are explicit on this point.

Thomas Alexander describes Deweyan democracy as 'the culture of a whole society in which experience is engaged in its power of fulfillment of life through cooperation and communication'; he claims that 'if democracy is to have a future, it must embrace an understanding of the deepest needs of human beings and the means of fulfilling them' (Alexander, 1998, p. 17). According to Alexander, then, the future of democracy depends upon our entire culture embracing a particular view of the 'deepest needs of human beings', and enacting the appropriate means for satisfying them. A society that rejects Alexander's view of our 'deepest needs' is a democracy in decline.

John Stuhr claims that Deweyan democracy presents a 'demand' for 'different personal conduct and far-reaching cultural reconstruction – deep changes in habits of thought and action, patterns of association and interaction, and personal and public values' (Stuhr, 2003, p. 55). He concludes that 'we must each seek to expand democracy ... we must realize in thought and action that democracy is a personal way of individual life ... and we must rededicate our lives to its realization – now' (Stuhr, 2003, p. 64). The fate of democracy depends upon each person dedicating his or her life to the realization of Dewey's vision.

James Gouinlock describes Deweyan democracy as a 'specific ordering of personal dispositions and modes of conduct that would be operative in all forms of interpersonal experience'; he continues: 'Political democracy, when it is real, is but an instance of this more generic form of life' (Gouinlock, 1999, p. 235). Hence a society in which people hold different 'personal dispositions and modes of conduct' is not a 'real' democracy.

The quasi-fanatical resonance of these statements is striking. But let us not be distracted. The problem is not that Dewey's conception of flourishing is false. Rather, the problem is

that the Deweyan democratic ideal can be reasonably rejected; one can reject growth as an ideal yet not revoke one's fitness for citizenship in a democratic society. In so far as the Deweyan democrats seek to reconstruct the whole of human association so that it is directed towards realizing their own conception of flourishing, they seek to create social and political institutions that are explicitly designed to cultivate norms and realize civic ideals that their fellow citizens could reasonably reject. In so far as they take the moral reasons supplied by their own vision of flourishing to be sufficient to justify public policy affecting their fellow citizens, they favor political conditions under which the state may coerce its citizens solely on the basis of reasons that they could reasonably reject. Deweyan democracy is unable to countenance reasonable pluralism and is thus oppressive. It is a brand of 'civic totalitarianism' (Macedo, 2000, p. 139), and thus is an inappropriate ideal for democratic society.

### *A Deweyan Response*

Why should Deweyans accept reasonable pluralism? To see why, consider current political circumstances. Although much of the conflict in our society is arguably due to various forms of irrationality – greed, ignorance, envy and so on – a large measure of disagreement occurs among persons who are able not only to articulate good reasons for their positions, but are willing and able to engage sincerely and respectfully with those with whom they disagree. It is not difficult to find a variety of reasoned positions on every major issue. Each of us must take those who hold positions that are inconsistent with our own to be *mistaken*; but an honest engagement with our sophisticated opponents leads us to recognize that there is a crucial difference between being *wrong* and being *stupid*. The fact of reasonable pluralism is simply the fact that in a free society one should expect to find reasoned opposition to every moral, philosophical or religious doctrine. To *reject* the fact of reasonable pluralism is to reject the distinction between being wrong and being stupid; it is to say that anyone who does not agree with your own view of things is not simply *mistaken* but *ignorant* or *foolish*. Given that Deweyans are fallibilists, no Deweyan could reject the fact of reasonable pluralism, for fallibilism presupposes the possibility of intelligent opposition in light of which one may revise one's views.

Barring the untenable response that all non-Deweyans are *ipso facto* unfit for democracy, the only recourse for the Deweyan is to recognize that his or her conception of flourishing is but one reasonable view among many. This realization will lead the Deweyan to *privatize* his or her project, to see the aspiration for growth as a *personal* project, not something to be woven into the fabric of society and not something that provides the 'supreme test' (MW12: 186) for democracy. To be clear, nothing in my argument criticizes, much less forbids, the privatized project of pursuing Deweyan growth.

But to privatize would be to *abandon* the Continuity, Way of Life and Perfectionist theses. It would import into Deweyan democracy the public/private distinction of traditional liberalism, a distinction that Dewey explicitly rejects (LW2: 275ff.); correspondingly, it would require Deweyans to relinquish much of their perfectionism. Moreover, a *privatized* Deweyan would renounce Dewey's philosophy of public education, since it advocates the

reconstruction of public schools so that they contribute to Deweyan flourishing.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, a privatized Deweyan would abandon the idea that democracy presents the ‘task before us’ (LW14: 224) of creating a way of life marked by the ‘possession and continual use of certain attitudes, forming personal character and determining desire and purpose in all the relations of life’ (LW14: 225–226). Similarly, a privatized Deweyan would reject Dewey’s claim that democracy is ‘radical’ because it requires great change in existing social institutions, ‘economic, legal and cultural’ (LW11: 299). Indeed, a privatized Deweyan could pursue growth in all of his or her social associations, but a privatized Deweyan must see the Deweyan project as but one kind of democratic life, not as an ideal that all must adopt. A privatized Deweyan democrat is not a *Deweyan* democrat at all.

### ***Pluralism and the ‘Problems of Men’***

Although the objection I have raised draws from Rawlsian concerns, it presupposes no sympathy with Rawls’ views.<sup>12</sup> It simply raises the *problem* that pluralism sets for democracy. Deweyans might respond by appealing to their shopworn injunction to dismiss ‘problems of philosophers’ and attend to the ‘problems of men’ (MW10: 46), claiming that reasonable pluralism is an artifice of a philosophy that is not properly attuned to real-life conditions. But this response fails. The fact of reasonable pluralism is a markedly evident aspect of modern life. One finds in newspapers and magazines, and on television, blogs and the street, proponents of reasonable moral and political views that differ from, and are opposed to, the ideals presupposed by Deweyan democracy. Moreover, all of the most pressing controversies of the day feature a plurality of reasonable positions formulated in terms of a wide variety of reasonable moral doctrines. That is, pressing moral dilemmas are in part disputes among opposed but nonetheless reasonable views about *what, morally, is at stake* in the dilemma and how to weigh different considerations regarding multiple values, including utility, happiness, autonomy, equality and liberty. To dismiss the fact of reasonable pluralism is to retreat from our actual experience.

As Deweyans hold that the worth of a philosophical view is to be judged according to its connection with real-world conditions, I take the argument that Deweyan democracy cannot countenance reasonable pluralism to be decisive. We have reasons – reasons that Deweyans must find decisive – to bid farewell to Deweyan democracy. Pragmatists who want to theorize democracy must look elsewhere.

### ***Pragmatist Options in Democratic Theory***

Among the ‘classical’ American pragmatists, only Dewey proposed a systematic political theory. The founder of pragmatism, Charles Peirce, wrote nothing in political philosophy and William James devoted only one essay to a decidedly political topic.<sup>13</sup> The more recent ‘neo-pragmatist’ views of Richard Rorty and Richard Posner have proven unsatisfying.<sup>14</sup> It would seem, then, that Deweyan democracy is the only option for pragmatist political theorists. Yet we have seen that Deweyan democracy fails. Could it be that pragmatism cannot formulate a compelling political philosophy?

Deweyans who think that pragmatism had better have some entailments for political philosophy must attempt to salvage Deweyan democracy. Elizabeth Anderson has offered a promising reinterpretation of Deweyan democracy along such lines.

## Anderson's Revision

### *Anderson on Deweyan Democracy*

According to Anderson, 'Dewey's experimentalist account of democracy offers a better model of the epistemology of democracy than alternatives' (Anderson, 2006, p. 9). To establish this, she contrasts Deweyan democracy with two competing epistemic models of democracy. As my interest is in her view of Deweyan democracy, I will not review her arguments against the non-Deweyan models.

Anderson identifies three 'constitutive features' of democracy: (1) diversity, (2) discussion and (3) dynamism (Anderson, 2006, p. 13). I describe these in order.

- (1) *The Epistemic Diversity of Citizens.* A democracy is composed of citizens of diverse ages, genders, classes, ethnicities, religions and so on. This multilayered diversity results in asymmetries regarding the effects of any given political decision, and this in turn results in asymmetries in the distribution of information relevant to group decision making. Democracy must be able to 'take advantage of the epistemic diversity of individuals' (Anderson, 2006, p. 11).
- (2) *The Non-instrumental Value of Discussion.* Inclusive and open discussion among citizens prior to voting is a 'constitutive, not accidental' feature of democracy (Anderson, 2006, p. 11). Importantly, discussion involves norms of equality, franchise, access to public fora and a free press. Unless such discussion ensues, citizens 'have little to go on but their private preferences' (Anderson, 2006, p. 11). Yet the point of democracy is not simply to aggregate individual preferences, but to pool individual intelligence and to bring it to bear on problems of public interest (Anderson, 2006, p. 9). Without discussion in this broad sense, democracy cannot take into account the perspectives and concerns of all citizens.
- (3) *Democratic Dynamism.* 'Democratic decision-making needs to recognize its own fallibility' (Anderson, 2006, p. 12). Towards this end, democracy needs to introduce 'feedback mechanisms' that enable it to 'correct its course in light of new information about the consequences of policies' (Anderson, 2006, p. 12). Hence, like norms of inclusive discussion, the institutions of regular elections and referenda are constitutive of democracy, for these represent democracy's commitment to fallibilism, and its corresponding aspiration to correct its mistakes and improve its own processes.

Anderson contends that Deweyan democracy 'represents the epistemic powers of all three constitutive features of democracy' (Anderson, 2006, p. 13). Since 'Dewey stressed the importance to democracy of bringing citizens from different walks of life together to define, through discussion, what they take to be problems of public interest' (Anderson, 2006, p. 14), Deweyan democracy fairly models the epistemic diversity of citizens. Dewey also saw that democratic discussion must be maximally inclusive in order to meet the

democratic requirement that collective decisions be 'responsive in a fair way to everyone's concerns' (Anderson, 2006, p. 14). Finally, given Dewey's experimentalist and fallibilist epistemology, Deweyan democracy understands democratic processes, such as elections, rights of petition, a free press and protests as 'mechanisms of feedback and accountability' (Anderson, 2006, p. 14) that institutionalize fallibilism and experimentalism, thus modeling democratic dynamism.

### *Evaluating Anderson's View*

Anderson's view is admittedly attractive. But note how austere Anderson's version of Deweyan democracy appears when compared with the picture sketched earlier. Anderson makes no reference to Dewey's views regarding socially emergent selves, growth and human flourishing, the Great Community, democratic participation as a necessary condition of freedom or the need for government to create democratic individuals. Nor does she assert the identity of democracy with the 'one, ultimate, ethical ideal of humanity' (EW1: 248), or contend that Dewey's theory of human flourishing should govern 'all modes of human association' (LW2: 325). Rather, Anderson describes Deweyan democracy as simply the 'application of scientific method to practical problems' (Anderson, 2006, p. 13) and 'a way of life governed by cultural norms of equality, discussion, and tolerance' (Anderson, 2006, p. 15). That is, Anderson has proposed a version of Deweyan democracy shorn of its civic totalism.

Anderson goes a long way towards showing how Deweyan democratic commitments could be weakened in a way that makes the view consistent with pluralism. However, in spite of its modesty, Anderson's view does not avoid embedding reasonably rejectable Deweyan commitments. She identifies Deweyan democracy with 'cooperative social experimentation' and the 'application of scientific method to practical problems' (Anderson, 2006, p. 13). It is well known that the terms 'experimentation,' 'intelligence' and 'method' are technical terms in Dewey's epistemological writings.<sup>15</sup> I will not venture into these issues except to point out that the very idea that practical political problems can fruitfully be addressed by means of 'scientific method' and 'experimentation' presupposes a specific meta-ethics. In Dewey's work, the commitment to applying intelligence to social problems follows from the naturalism developed in his metaphysical and ethical writings. In any case, the idea that we must resolve our social problems by appeal to 'cooperative social experimentation' would be rejected by those who reject naturalism in moral philosophy. On some reasonable views, experimentation and scientific method are wholly irrelevant to a range of questions of social policy; on such views, questions of, say, the permissibility of capital punishment or progressive taxation are questions about what is required by *justice*, and justice is not something that can be examined empirically, but must be investigated conceptually or in some other non-empirical way.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, many reasonable people will strongly reject any appeal to experimentation when it comes to fundamental matters of justice; they will claim aggressively that, in light of the dignity they embody, *human lives* are not appropriate subjects for 'social experimentation'.

Deweyans regard those who hold such views to be mistaken about the nature of value. Perhaps the Deweyan is correct. But the point is that our conception of *democracy* cannot

embed a commitment to moral naturalism, or any other reasonably rejectable meta-ethic. Anti-naturalists may be wrong, but they are not for that reason unfit for democracy. It seems, then, that Anderson's version of Deweyan democracy, though much more modest than other versions, nonetheless involves reasonable rejectable commitments. The problem of pluralism re-emerges.

Perhaps Anderson's version of Deweyan democracy is even more restrained than I have allowed. She may say that she claims only that democratic communities should address their social problems by pooling information and other cognitive resources from their diverse citizenry in a way that gives a proper hearing and full consideration to all points of view, with the expectation that all collective decisions are but provisional stopping points in a continuous process of self-correction. Again, this view is compelling. But is it distinctively Deweyan? There is nothing here that Madison, Mill, Popper or even Russell would have rejected; furthermore, Cass Sunstein (2001; 2003) endorses precisely this picture, and although he sometimes refers approvingly to Dewey, he is not a Deweyan democrat. Anderson's more restrained version of Deweyan democracy is not distinctively Deweyan. Can pragmatism offer no distinctive and viable political theory?

## A New Pragmatist Option

### *A Peircean Alternative*

I have argued that Deweyan democracy is non-viable. I now sketch an alternative pragmatist option in thinking about the epistemic features of democracy. This option draws from Peirce's, not Dewey's, pragmatism. After presenting the Peircean view, I will show how it avoids running afoul of the fact of reasonable pluralism and yet can account for Anderson's constitutive features of democracy. I will conclude by showing how the Peircean view is distinctively pragmatist.

Before proceeding, however, it should be emphasized that I can offer here only a *sketch* of Peircean democracy. I aspire here not to develop and defend the Peircean conception, but only to propose it as the way in which pragmatist political philosophy should proceed. Hence, I aim only to show that the Peircean view can countenance reasonable pluralism while remaining a distinctively pragmatist option.<sup>17</sup>

The very idea of Peircean democracy may seem strained. Peirce wrote nothing in political philosophy, and apparently never planned to bring politics within his purview. Yet, as I have argued elsewhere (Talisce, 2003; 2007, ch. 3), Peirce's seminal essay on 'The Fixation of Belief' (Peirce, 1931–58, CP5.358–387) should be read as promoting a social epistemology according to which norms of proper inquiry entail democratic political norms.<sup>18</sup> To see this, consider the core of Peirce's pragmatist epistemology, which can be summarized as follows:

- (1) To believe *p* is to hold that *p* is true.<sup>19</sup>
- (2) To hold that *p* is true is to hold that *p* would be able to withstand the challenge of ongoing scrutiny as new reasons, arguments and evidence are brought to bear.<sup>20</sup>
- (3) To hold that a belief would meet such challenges is to commit to the project of *justifying* one's belief, what Peirce called 'inquiry'.

- (4) The project of squaring one's beliefs with reasons and evidence is an ongoing *social* endeavor that requires participation in a community of inquiry (CP5.311).

A crucial element of Peirce's epistemology is that it aspires to draw only from norms *internal* to belief. The Peircean contends that believing *itself* commits one to engaging in inquiry, because *what it is* to have a belief is to take oneself to be so engaged. Hence the Peircean cognitive norms are not *imposed* from without, they are not components of a controversial epistemology; they rather articulate the cognitive commitments *we already endorse*, regardless of the content of our beliefs.

An epistemic conception of democracy follows intuitively from Peircean epistemology: one should endorse a democratic political order because only in a democracy can one live up to one's epistemic commitments. That is, if being a believer commits one to the project of justification, and if the project of justification commits one to the social enterprise of examining, exchanging, testing and challenging reasons, then one can satisfy one's commitments *qua* believer only within a political context in which it is possible to be an inquirer. Peircean inquiry requires characteristically democratic norms; in order to inquire, there must be norms of equality, free speech, a freedom of information, open debate, protected dissent and access to decision-making institutions. Moreover, since the project of justification involves testing one's beliefs against the broadest possible pool of considerations, inquiry requires more radically democratic norms, including participation, inclusion and recognition.

Additionally, the Peircean argument carries a number of institutional ramifications. If inquiry is to commence, the formal infrastructure of democracy must be in place, including a constitution, courts, accountable bodies of representation, regular elections and a free press. There must be a system of public schooling designed to equip students in the epistemic habits necessary for inquiry, and institutions of distributive justice to eliminate as far as possible material obstructions to democratic citizenship. Additionally, democracy *might* also require special provisions for preserving public spaces, creating fora for citizen deliberation and the like.<sup>21</sup>

Peircean democracy might seem very closely allied with Deweyan democracy. However, there are crucial differences. First, Peirceans reject the Continuity Thesis. Whereas on the Deweyan view the democratic order is justified by an overarching and controversial ideal of flourishing, the Peircean view invokes no *moral* vision. The Peircean view models democratic institutions and norms strictly in terms of a set of *epistemic* commitments that are internal to belief as such. Again, it says that *no matter what one believes* about the good life, the nature of the self, the meaning of human existence, the 'deepest needs of human beings' or the value of community, one has reason to endorse a democratic political order simply in virtue of the fact that one holds beliefs. For example, to believe, with Dewey, that 'shared experience is the greatest of human goods' (LW1: 157) is to take it to be *true* that shared experience is the greatest of human goods, and to take this to be true is to be committed to the idea that the best reasons, arguments and evidence would *confirm* it. The Peircean insists that this is something that can be established only by actually examining reasons, arguments and evidence. And in order to do *that*, one must inquire. But inquiry can be

engaged in only within a social order governed by the epistemic and institutional norms identified above. Thus, the commitment to any particular moral view implicitly commits one to norms that can be realized only within a democracy. According to the Peircean, the epistemic commitments that are implicit within our understanding of ourselves as believers are sufficient to support a conception of democracy. No moral doctrine is required.

Since the Peircean conception of democracy does not presuppose a doctrine about 'the one, ultimate, ethical ideal of humanity' (EW1: 248), it can acknowledge reasonable pluralism. Peircean democrats can recognize that there are many distinct and epistemically responsible moral visions that are compatible with democracy. Accordingly, Peirceans reject the Way of Life Thesis; they understand that questions of how public schools, workplaces and churches should be organized, what communities should look like and what constitutes good citizenship are *not* questions that can be settled by appealing to democracy itself; they are instead questions to be pursued discursively *within* a democratic politics, and they are able to recognize that, in a democratic society, not all human association needs to be governed by the same norms.

Peirceans and Deweyans differ also on the Perfectionist Thesis. What counts for Deweyans is the proximity of a given democratic outcome to a substantive moral vision of the ideal society; for them, an outcome produced by the political processes of democracy that does not aim at promoting growth is democratically deficient. Hence social and political institutions must be built that foster in citizens the habits and attitudes that will enable them to discern what is necessary for growth and dispose them to favor growth-enabling policies. By contrast, what counts for Peirceans is whether outcomes result from properly democratic processes of reasoning. Thus Peirceans acknowledge that there are many institutional forms that democracy may take; more importantly, they can acknowledge that there are many different answers to questions of public policy that are consistent with democracy. To be sure, there is a perfectionist element in Peircean democracy, but it is aimed not at flourishing as such, but rather at the development of the epistemic capacities necessary for responsible believing.

In short, by drawing upon decidedly *epistemic* commitments, the Peircean view avoids civic totalism. Hence the Peircean offers a far more modest politics than the Deweyan. Whereas Dewey thought that getting democracy right meant getting the whole of moral philosophy right, the Peircean leaves open the dialectical space for substantive disagreements about deep moral and social questions within democracy. Peircean democracy is hence not hostile to the pluralism of reasonable views.

### ***An Objection***

An objection targets the distinction between moral and epistemic commitments: just as Deweyan democracy is based on a single moral vision, Peirceans expect everyone to adopt a single epistemology. The objection continues that Peircean epistemology is at least as controversial as Dewey's moral philosophy; hence both views deny reasonable pluralism. Deweyans deny it at the level of moral commitments, and Peirceans deny it at the level of epistemic commitments.

This objection fails. The commitments at the core of Peircean democracy do not constitute a comprehensive epistemology; rather they are commitments of any well-developed epistemology. Internalists, externalists, foundationalists, coherentists and so on all agree that beliefs aim at truth, and that when we believe, we take ourselves to be responding to reasons, argument and evidence. Accordingly, the four Peircean commitments represent an attempt to make explicit the epistemology that is implicit in our existing practice. They are the commitments we have in virtue of the fact that we are believers. Since contestation itself presupposes norms of reason-responsiveness and truth-aiming, the Peircean commitments are not reasonably contestable.

Peirceans and Deweyans are therefore *not* in the same boat. The Deweyan ideal of growth is reasonably rejectable; hence Deweyan democracy runs afoul of pluralism. The Peircean epistemic commitments, by contrast, are robust enough to support a conception of democracy, but modest enough to permit deep disputes over fundamental ideas. Hence the Peircean can offer what the Deweyan cannot, namely, a pragmatist conception of democracy that is consistent with reasonable pluralism.

### ***Peircean Democracy and Anderson's Constitutive Features***

Recall Anderson's three constitutive features of democracy: (1) the value of epistemic diversity, (2) the non-instrumental value of discussion and (3) democratic dynamism. The Peircean view models these features nicely.

Peircean democracy embraces epistemic diversity. Since the Peircean contends that to hold a belief is to be committed to the thought that the best reasons would *confirm* it, believers must be prepared to test their belief against the fullest range of reasons available. Especially important for the Peircean believer are viewpoints and considerations that he or she is likely to have overlooked. Accordingly, the Peircean believer has a positive epistemic motivation not only to *tolerate* diverse epistemic considerations, but to *seek out* differently situated partners in inquiry. According to the Peircean, engagement with the broadest range of considerations is a constitutive norm of inquiry, an essential component of truth seeking; thus Peircean democracy models epistemic diversity.

Peircean democracy also captures the non-instrumental value of discussion. Since preparedness to exchange reasons is a constitutive norm of belief, the Peircean sees discussion as intrinsic to proper inquiry. The Peircean thought is that a self-assessment of the sort, *I believe that p, but have discussed the matter with no-one and thus have considered none of the countervailing considerations*, reveals an *epistemic* deficiency; it is in effect equivalent to the strained thought that *I hold that p could withstand scrutiny, but resolutely elect not to scrutinize p*. For the Peircean, those with whom one disagrees are owed a respectful and sincere hearing for epistemological reasons: our commitment to the truth of our beliefs entails a commitment to taking disagreement, and thus those who disagree with us, seriously (Misak, 2004b). Peircean democracy acknowledges the non-instrumental value of discussion.

Finally, the Peircean view is able to model democracy's dynamism. The constitutive norms of belief commit us to being responsive to reasons, which in turn requires us to remain open

to revising our beliefs in the course of ongoing inquiry. Accordingly, a conception of democracy rooted in a Peircean epistemology recognizes the need to keep channels of dissent, accountability and feedback open even after a procedurally proper collective decision is reached.

Peircean democracy models Anderson's constitutive features of democracy. Importantly, it does so without invoking a deep and controversial philosophical doctrine; the Peircean epistemology is decidedly thin, resting as it does on a few pedestrian insights about the relations between belief, truth and reasons. Thus the Peircean view is more purely epistemic than Deweyan democracy, and therefore less objectionable.

### *Is Peircean Democracy Distinctively Pragmatist?*

What makes Peircean democracy distinctively pragmatist? The core of Peircean democracy is the decidedly Peircean insight about truth, according to which the concept of truth must be analyzed in terms of our practices of believing, asserting, inquiring and arguing. Due to some sloppy articulations of this idea, Peirce is frequently interpreted as having proposed an 'end of inquiry' theory of truth. On such views, truth is *defined* as that which an ideal inquirer would believe at the hypothetical limit of inquiry. For reasons that are familiar, such a definition of truth is non-viable. However, as Cheryl Misak (2004a; 2007), among others, has argued, it is a mistake to attribute this definition to Peirce.<sup>22</sup> The Peircean holds that we should eschew the attempt to define truth (CP8.100) and instead seek to 'elucidate' the concept by 'exploring its connections with practice' (Misak, 2007, pp. 68–9).<sup>23</sup> Hence the Peircean does not offer a *definition* of truth, but rather the thought that when we believe, we aim at truth, and when we aim at truth, we take ourselves to be responding to the best reasons. Thus, for the Peircean, the concept of truth is intimately bound up with our practices of inquiry. And our practices of inquiry are intrinsically bound up with a distinctive kind of normativity according to which beliefs *ought* to accord with our reasons, *ought* to be able to survive the scrutiny of other inquirers and *ought* to hold up against the test of future experience. The central claim of the Peircean democrat is that these norms govern beliefs as such and implicate social epistemological norms that can be satisfied best under democratic institutions.

This of course settles no major policy issue within democracy. But it does identify a kind of reason that pragmatists may employ when arguing for the progressive policies traditionally associated with Dewey; more specifically, the Peircean proposes that reasons concerning the *epistemological* impact of political policy are publicly justifying. For example, the Peircean can make a case for thinking that restructuring our public education system along progressive lines is necessary from the point of view of encouraging responsible epistemic habits without invoking a controversial moral ideal. Hence the Peircean view is pragmatically potent in a way that the Deweyan view is not. It simply cuts no ice with our fellow citizens to advocate public policy on the basis of a controversial moral ideal like growth. The Peircean view identifies a kind of reason that should be accepted by all democratic citizens, regardless of their fundamental moral commitments; thus it enables pragmatists more effectively to advocate publicly on behalf of the progressive measures that they favor.

To conclude: I have argued that Deweyan democracy fails because it cannot countenance reasonable pluralism. I then examined Anderson's formulation of Deweyan democracy, and found it inadequate. I then sketched the basics of an alternative pragmatist conception of democracy, one that builds upon Peirce's epistemology, and argued that this conception can capture the constitutive features of democracy as identified by Anderson. Of course, more needs to be said about Peircean democracy to show that it is a strong contender among contemporary conceptions of democracy. My objective here has been to show only that pragmatists who want to theorize democracy should be Peirceans.

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## Notes

- 1 It is hard to find a work of contemporary democratic theory that does not make positive reference to Dewey. See, for example, Bohman, 2007; Dworkin, 2006; MacGilvray, 2004; Nussbaum, 2007; Richardson, 2002; Sandel, 2005; Shapiro, 2001; Stout, 2004; Sunstein, 2001; Young, 2000.
- 2 References to Dewey's work are keyed the *Collected Works*, which are divided into *Early*, *Middle* and *Later* works. Citations employ the standard formula: (volume number: page number).
- 3 Hence Festenstein, 'The contours of Dewey's liberal democratic thought follow his account of ethics' (Festenstein, 1997, p. 98). Compare Pappas, '[Dewey's] notion of democracy is an outgrowth of his views about moral experience' (Pappas, 2008, p. 166).
- 4 Dewey also holds that 'society and individuals are correlative, organic, to one another' (MW12: 187). Contemporary Deweyans uphold this commitment; see Boisvert, 1998, p. 54; Colapietro, 2006, p. 25; Fesmire, 2003, p. 11; Green, 1999, p. 6; Stuhr, 1998, p. 85.
- 5 Hence the 'heart and guarantee of democracy is in free gatherings of neighbors on the street corner to discuss back and forth what is read in uncensored news of the day' (LW14: 227).
- 6 See Festenstein: 'the form of social and political order that [Dewey] commends expresses and fosters individual self-realization' (Festenstein, 1995, p. 173).
- 7 For contemporary defenses of perfectionism, see Raz (1986), Sher (1997) and Wall (1998).
- 8 This is not to say that weighted voting *as such* could not be publicly justified, but only that *Joe's reasons* are not sufficient to justify it. For an attempt to give a *public* justification for weighted voting, see Estlund (2000; 2008, ch. XI).
- 9 See Pappas: 'Dewey's views about democracy cannot be separated from his plea that we accept a certain metaphysics' (Pappas, 2008, p. 267).
- 10 Hence Boisvert, 'A democracy should be judged by the way all of its citizens are able to develop their capacities and thus grow' (Boisvert, 1998, pp. 71–2).
- 11 Dewey claims that 'the purpose of school education is to insure the continuance of education by organizing the powers that insure growth' (MW9: 56); elsewhere, he identified education as the 'freeing of individual capacity in a progressive growth directed to social aims' (MW9: 105).
- 12 In fact, I have elsewhere argued (Talisse, 2007, ch. 4) that Rawls' understanding of the fact of reasonable pluralism is too strong in that it holds that disagreement among reasonable persons is 'inevitable' and 'permanent' (Rawls, 1996, p. 129); I have opted instead for a weaker reading of the fact of reasonable pluralism, according to which reasonable disagreement is present and persistent, though not necessarily permanent. The weaker view is sufficient to raise the problem of justification I have been pressing in this essay.
- 13 Not only did Peirce not write in political philosophy, but his many projections for a grand work expounding his philosophical system contain no indication that he ever *intended* to write about politics. Despite his being a fervent essayist, James' only work dealing explicitly with a political topic is his 'The Moral Equivalent of War' (James, 1977). Some would argue that Jane Addams

- and G. H. Mead should be included among the 'original' pragmatists; to be sure, Addams and Mead wrote plenty on politics. But in both cases, their thought owes much of its sophistication and nuance to Dewey's philosophy.
- 14 I cannot defend this claim here. See Talisse (2005; 2007, ch. 2) for discussion.
- 15 See Talisse (2002) for further elaboration.
- 16 For Dewey, science is the 'one sure road of access to truth', and we must give up the idea of 'special truths' that cannot be known empirically (LW9: 23); he is speaking here of religious claims, but the point applies equally to non-naturalist moral claims. See Macedo, 2000, pp. 139–42.
- 17 I offer a more detailed characterization and defense of the Peirce view in Talisse (2001; 2003; 2007, ch. 4).
- 18 Citations to Peirce's writing will be keyed to *The Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce* (ed. Hartshorne, Weiss and Burks) and will employ the standard formula: (CP, volume number.paragraph number).
- 19 Peirce calls this a 'mere tautology' (CP5.375). Compare Wiggins, 1998.
- 20 This is my gloss on Peirce's view of truth (CP5.407), about which I shall have something to say later. My view follows Misak, who attributes to Peirce the view that a true belief 'is a belief that cannot be improved upon, a belief that would forever meet the challenges of reason, argument, and evidence' (Misak, 2000, p. 49).
- 21 I think here of the policies endorsed by Cass Sunstein to ensure deliberation among persons of different opinions; see Sunstein, 1996; 2001; 2003. See also Ackerman and Fishkin, 2004.
- 22 See especially Hookway, 2000; 2004; Wiggins, 1998; 2004. See also Nagel, 2001, p. 127.
- 23 The term 'elucidate' is used by Wiggins (2002); see also Wiggins, 2004, p. 125, n. 20. Compare Davidson, 1996.

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