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Eric M. Boyer

FOR THOSE INTERESTED in the life and work of John Dewey, the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries can best be described as eras of resurgence without re-construction. After a long period of neglect, interest in Dewey and pragmatism has awakened, thanks in large part to the work of neo-pragmatists like Richard Rorty (see Farr, *John Dewey*; Bernstein, *Resurgence*; and Rorty, *Philosophy*). This renewed interest has led to a variety of lively and intellectually fruitful debates about the place of pragmatism in the twenty-first century, and specifically the relationship of pragmatism to the neo-liberalism that dominates the post-Cold-War political landscape. Far from fading away, Dewey’s early twentieth century debates over the structure and ends of liberal democracy have taken on new life in the early twenty-first century as economic and political crises expose the weaknesses of the new neo-liberal paradigm. In our era of increasing political and economic instability, the question arises: In what ways is Dewey relevant to the twenty-first century?

Unfortunately, in grappling with this question, far too many analysts have shown that for all of the renewed interest in Dewey, very little attention has been paid to the project of reconstruction. In the often-contentious debates over Dewey’s place in the post-Cold-War world, it is ironically a pre-Cold-War notion of “Deweyism” that is being debated. Though the term was coined by David Ricci in *The Tragedy of Political Science*, “Deweyism” refers to an understanding of Dewey with roots in a struggle that took place over fifty years before Ricci’s book was published. This struggle of the 1920s and 1930s was over the meaning of Karl

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Marx, and it pitted the “Red Pragmatism” of Max Eastman and Sidney Hook against the orthodox Marxism of theorists like Leon Trotsky and George Novack. While the world has certainly changed since this previous era of economic collapse and instability, the understanding of Dewey that it gave rise to has survived intact, long outliving the sectarian and polemical historical context that marked its birth. While the criticisms that together form the basis of “Deweyism” are numerous and varied, I will address three distinct aspects:

1) *Deweyism as a system of means without ends*: According to this line of critique, Dewey pays attention to the tools of inquiry at the expense of articulating its proper ends. Thus, Dewey’s pragmatism involves “the criticism of means towards uncriticized ends” (Elliott 238) and shows that “values could be subordinated to technique” (Bourne 343). Louis Hartz claims that Dewey has played an important part in upholding “the Lockean liberal consensus” because his pragmatism rests “on miles of submerged conviction” such that “all problems emerge as problems of technique” (10). It is this conception of Dewey’s thought that led Ricci to coin the term “Deweyism,” which is meant to mark “an important shift in the fundamentals of political argument from matters of principle to effective results” (106), so that “the tricky ground of ethical analysis and explication could be avoided entirely” (108).

2) *Deweyism as economically and politically naïve*: According to this second line of critique, Dewey’s inability to formulate and critique the ends of action undermines his ability to analyze means. George Novack, writing under the pseudonym William Warde, critiques Dewey’s “lack of understanding of the forces at work in American society” (Warde, “Fate” 54). Because he does not take into account the barriers to intelligent action that are erected by the capitalist system, Dewey converts education into a type of fetish, projecting a “naïve and almost magical belief” in its power (“Fate” 56-57). For Novack, Dewey is not only naïve, but a threat second only to Stalinism (Warde, “Revisionism” 174). Leon Trotsky continues this line of critique, referring to Dewey as “a moralizing Philistine” who rejects the inevitable violence of class struggle (163).

3) *Deweyism as endorsement of the status quo*: Because it is able to formulate neither ends nor means, Deweyism is little more than

a paper-tiger. Amidst his attacks concerning pragmatism's promiscuity, inconsistencies, and half-measures, George Novack claims that when viewed from "the correct class angle," the seemingly diverse thought and work of Dewey forms a coherent and contingent whole: "Dewey's philosophy was the theoretical expression of the outlook of the educated petty bourgeoisie in the epoch of the climb of American capitalism to world domination and the transformation of bourgeois democracy into imperialist reaction" (Novack 41). Alan Wald finds fault in this critique, but only due to the fact that Novack believes pragmatism is solely the ideology of the educated petty-bourgeoisie. Wald believes that pragmatism is the philosophy of bourgeois society in general (307). The overall thrust of this critique is effectively captured by Lewis Mumford, who argues that Dewey's "fuzzy and formless" writing is a part of the "pragmatic acquiescence" to an empty industrialism: "No one has plumbed the bottom of Mr. Dewey's philosophy who does not feel in back of it the shapelessness, the faith in the current go of things, and the general utilitarian idealism of Chicago" (255-256).

Unfortunately, this simplified understanding of Dewey has long outlived the sectarian political context from which it sprang. In his history of American radicalism, Brian Lloyd reiterates Novack's claim that pragmatism is simply the ideology of the petty-bourgeoisie. According to Lloyd, the failure of socialism to take root in America is laid at the feet of those Marxists who dabbled in pragmatism, and those pragmatists who called themselves Marxists. These "[r]efugees from impoverished petty bourgeois regions" led to American Marxists turning their backs on revolutionary theory: In sum, the pragmatists "took Marx away from the Marxists" (Lloyd 14). Like Lloyd, Andrew Feffer believes that Dewey's philosophy is built from a submerged faith in a reactionary and anti-democratic form of American exceptionalism. As evidence for this claim, Feffer focuses on Dewey's successful effort to expel communists from the American Federation of Teachers, claiming that "Dewey's legacy in the 1930s for the repressive anti-communism of the 1940s and '50s should be obvious" (Feffer 97). The fact that a version of "Deweyism" has been embraced not only by Dewey's critics, but also by contemporary neo-pragmatists, further complicates this situation. Richard Rorty, for example, embraced Dewey as the philosopher of social hope,

whose “vocabulary allows room for unjustifiable hope, and an ungroundable but vital sense of human solidarity” (*Consequences* 208). While Rorty certainly captured Dewey’s seemingly boundless optimism, neither “Deweyism” nor Rorty engaged with Dewey’s claim that “growth” is the only “end-in-itself” of human inquiry and action.

In this paper, I interrogate this disconnect between an early twentieth-century Dewey and the twenty-first-century world. My goal is two-fold: to discard the conception of “Deweyism” and unearth a relevant and radical twenty-first century Dewey. In pursuing these goals, I argue that the lack of attention to the end of “growth” in Dewey’s understanding of liberal democracy leads to a gross simplification of Dewey’s political theory. While the twenty-first century, neo-liberal paradigm values economic growth as an end-in-itself, Dewey’s liberal democracy is oriented toward the end of human growth, a growth in human engagement that has a tense relationship with the economic goals of neo-liberalism. Dewey’s critics claim that his system of means without ends is economically naïve and politically timid, but I will explore the ways in which the end of “growth” infuses Dewey’s liberal democracy with a form of political and economic radicalism that is surprisingly similar to the radicalism of Karl Marx. Far from a naïve puppet of the new neo-liberal paradigm, Dewey is committed to a struggle for a political and economic system that allows for the growth of human consciousness and intelligent action.

HUMAN INQUIRY AS QUEST FOR UNITY WITHOUT ABSOLUTES

My exploration of “growth” will begin with the discussion of the first alleged flaw that gives form to the system of Dewey-ism: the claim that Dewey constructs a system of endless means, a method to analyze and criticize technique that lacks a method to formulate ends. Analysis of this claim is complicated by the fact that a superficial look at Dewey’s theory of inquiry seems to confirm it. Dewey spends much of his time and energy discussing the principles of inquiry, frequently utilizing comparisons to the natural sciences. This method of inquiry is not paired with a system of *a priori* ends, but rather he assumes the ends of action will arise from within the process of inquiry itself. Because Dewey does not attempt to delineate and pursue a set of timeless ends

for all times and all places, it is easy to see how such a straw-man critique arose and took hold.

To see what is wrong with this critique and arrive at the concept of growth, it is necessary to take a closer look at Dewey's understanding of human inquiry. Before the radical political, economic, and social consequences of growth can be evaluated, its status as the end-in-itself of inquiry must be understood.

While the first indications of Dewey's mature theory of inquiry can be seen in his early works, it was not until the early twentieth century that Dewey completely naturalized the theory of inquiry that he appropriated from G.W.F. Hegel. Evidence of this naturalistic turn can be seen in Dewey's early twentieth century work on logical and pedagogical theory, although it is in 1929's *The Quest for Certainty* that he offers his most sustained and compelling critique of philosophical absolutes. In this series of lectures, Dewey traces philosophy's search for immutable foundations back to the uncertainties inherent in the practical world. Because human experience is perilous and fraught with uncertainties, philosophers undertake "a quest for a peace which is assured," and in the process retreat to an *a priori* and risk-free world of antecedent existences and essences (*Quest* 7). The properties of this unchanging realm of Being are supposed to provide the authoritative standard for life, and this allows philosophers to take on the role of spectators. When thus split apart, the realms of theory and practice cannot easily be brought back together. The artificial division brings with it a host of artificial problems, chief of which is the problem of reconciling the findings of the natural sciences with philosophical ideas concerning value. In an ironic turn, philosophy concerns itself with the contemplation of ultimate ends while at the same time neglecting the means by which these ends could be made more secure.

In confronting the problems of philosophy's search for certitude, Dewey faced a kind of methodological impasse. He found current versions of both idealism and materialism to be problematic in that absolute idealism denied the objective reality of the natural world while crude forms of materialism denied the power of human practice. Dewey's resolution of this impasse involved a lifelong effort to reconstruct philosophy, forcing it to adopt a method of empirical naturalism and stand amidst the ever-changing interactions of nature as mediated by the intentional opera-

tions of humanity. Such a “Copernican revolution” in philosophy would move beyond the artificial problems of the past and act as guide to human action (*Quest* 232). Human inquiry would no longer be understood as the search for the eternally stable amidst the empirically perilous. Instead, the ends of human action would be brought into the world of experience, so that they may be intelligently connected with the appropriate means.

To accomplish this reconstructive revolution, Dewey turns to an empirical study of “the generic traits of existence.” It is on this unlikely metaphysical terrain that Dewey undertakes “the task of analytical dismemberment and synthetic reconstruction of experience” (*Experience and Nature* 42). Dewey begins with the unstable and often perilous world of experience as it actually confronts human beings: He unites the precarious and the stable, the incomplete and the recurrent, the pleasurable and the painful. Like the philosophers, he cannot escape from this peril, but instead must embrace the incompleteness and precariousness that makes “every existence, as well as every idea and human act, an experiment in fact, even though not in design” (*Experience* 63).

Human beings do not contemplate this unfinished world from afar, but are always already immersed in the world of experience “not as marbles are in a box but as events are in history, in a moving, growing, never finished process” (*Experience* 224). In other words, human actors do not encounter objects of experience as isolated objects of cognition. Rather, they engage in inquiry directed toward objects of concern that exist within complex contexts of meaning (*Experience* 85). This inquiry is initiated when the everyday contexts of meaning break down and no longer make sense. In these situations, what was once familiar and unnoticed, emerges as problematic; it “appears in the sense in which a bright object appears in a dark room, while other things remain obscure, hidden” (*Experience* 111). The problematic object stands out in its connections to larger processes, becoming a “towards-which” that no longer fits. In such processes of inquiry, both the means and the ends of human action are determined by the specific characteristics of the problem to be addressed. Means become means-toward-which and ends become ends-in-view. As problems emerge, initial attempts to resolve the situation will begin with a type of playful manipulation that re-

mains close to patterns of habit and prior knowledge. When these habit-bound attempts prove ineffective, they give way to more rigorous means and more ambitious ends, all with the goal of understanding and controlling the situation's larger processes and connections.

By immersing human beings in the simultaneously perilous and enabling world, Dewey rejects philosophy's quest for certainty. This rejection of absolutes does not, however, lead to a "system of endless means." Rather, the resulting conception of means and ends is one that has no need for extra-empirical foundations, since all inquiry is shown to be an attempt to alter the world of experience such that objects once again fall into place and make sense. Inquiry "moves in each particular case from differences toward unity; from indeterminate and ambiguous position to clear determination, from confusion and disorder to system" (*Experience* 60). This generates a notion of ends that is both practical and morally and politically defensible.

While the claim that Dewey does not account for ends can be dismissed in light of his theory of inquiry, the kind of ends that Dewey accounts for must be addressed. While it is clear that Dewey incorporates both means *and* ends into his analysis of inquiry, for many critics (on both the political right and left) these ends are simply those of comfort, ease, and utility. In *The Conservative Mind*, Russell Kirk attacks Dewey as an apologist for "[t]he belligerent expansive and naturalistic tendencies" of an era in which "life has no aims but physical satisfaction" (418-419). Charges that Dewey created a shallow "Benthamite" utilitarianism also came from the political left. For example, Max Horkheimer decries Dewey's focus on "subjective reason," which he claims leads to a crude and dangerous form of utilitarianism. On his reading, Dewey is single-mindedly obsessed with the means of inference and deduction, casting aside a concern for ethics and politics (Horkheimer 3-7). The danger of Dewey's thought is that it will destroy humanity's ability to discuss and evaluate ends, potentially leading to a world which "ceases to care not only about . . . metaphysical entities but also about murders perpetuated behind closed frontiers or simply in the dark" (Horkheimer 46-47). The similarities of Kirk and Horkheimer's critiques are as interesting as they are ironic. Though they disagree on almost all other political matters, they

both agree that Dewey's thought represents a grave danger to society.

Though the details differ, these critics from the right and left have a shared conception of Dewey's philosophy. They claim that despite its apparent radicalism, Dewey's thought is nothing more than a dressed-up version of utilitarianism, leading to political quietism and an endorsement of the American status quo. In order to see the flaws in these persistent criticisms, one must engage Dewey's concept of "growth." It is this concept that most directly and forcefully addresses the second and third lines of critique that make up the system of Deweyism. Within the process of inquiry outlined above, it is growth that Dewey points to as the only end-in-itself. The consequences of growth are far more radical than Dewey's critics are willing to admit. These consequences make it impossible to maintain that Dewey advocates political meagerness.

GROWTH AS END-IN-ITSELF

The second and third aspects of "Deweyism," imply that Dewey's thought leads to political quietism, and they are perhaps the most pervasive criticisms leveled by Dewey's critics. As we have seen, critics on both the right and left see his theory of inquiry as inextricably wedded to the bureaucratic and technocratic industrialism of American business culture. The charge of quietism is closely connected to the first aspect of Deweyism, discussed above: It is closely connected, that is, to the claim that Dewey's attempt to dismantle traditional philosophy and naturalize the concept of "ends" leads to a sterile philosophy that cannot critique and transform society. If inquiry begins with the un-ease of a problematic situation and culminates in an end-in-view of re-established unity and understanding, then it would seem to minimize change that rises above a mere tinkering with the status quo.

While Dewey's own awkward formulations are in many ways responsible for the continued strength of this critique, the claim that he has neutralized critique in his attempt to naturalize philosophy is based on a narrow and selective reading of his work. While it is true that inquiry responds to specific problems, human beings are much more than troubleshooters re-establishing harmony in a static and unchanging realm. To the contrary,

the process of inquiry alters experience, leading not only to the discovery of new objects, but also to a deepening and enlargement of those objects that are familiar. As a problematic situation is worked through, our understanding is enriched. Inquiry leads not to comfort and ease, but instead to new problems, alternative means-toward-which, and previously unseen ends-in-view. The long-term result of such inquiry is a type of wisdom which "discovers in thoughtful observation and experiment the method of administering the unfinished processes of existence so that frail goods shall be substantiated, secure goods be extended, and the precarious promises of good that haunt experienced things be more liberally fulfilled" (*Experience* 76-77).

No matter its end-in-view, all human inquiry leads to precisely this enlargement, enrichment, and expansion of experience, which Dewey captures with his concept of "growth."¹ Growth does not mark a fixed state of fulfillment to be attained, but rather denotes a process of continual improvement and progress. Because it does not rise above experience, but rather denotes the enlargement of experience, Dewey claims that growth is the only end that can be referred to as an end-in-itself:

Growth itself is the only moral "end" . . . Government, business, art, religion, all social institutions have a meaning, a purpose. That purpose is to set free and to develop the capacities of human individuals without respect to race, sex, class or economic status . . . the supreme test of all political institutions and industrial arrangements shall be the contribution they make to the all-around growth of every member of society. (*Reconstruction* 177 and 186)

The end of "growth" demands that every social institution be interrogated to discover its specific consequences:

Just what response does this social arrangement, political or economic, evoke, and what effect does it have upon the disposition of those who engage in it? Does it release capacity? If so, how widely? Among a few, with a corresponding depression in others, or in an extensive and equitable way? Is the capacity which is set free also directed in some coherent way, so that it becomes a power, or its manifestation spasmodic and capricious? (*Reconstruction* 197)

Far from acquiescent to cultural decline or obstructionist toward a better future, Dewey's concept of growth has radical consequences not only for philosophy, but for education, society, the economy, and politics as well.

The most immediate consequences of growth as end-in-itself can be seen in the discipline of philosophy. Philosophers can no longer busy themselves with the contemplation of fixed and absolute truths, nor in the search for firm foundations to secure and affix that which is valued. Rather, philosophy must become a kind of criticism, “a method of discriminating among goods on the basis of the conditions of their appearance” that “goes beyond immediate existence to its relationships, the conditions which mediate it and the things to which it is in turn mediatory” (*Experience* 296-297). Philosophers must not only become critics; they must also give up their claim to an exclusively philosophical form of truth. Criticism is not a matter of abstract treatises and formal systems, but rather occurs whenever we move from accepting an object unthinkingly to questioning the object with an eye to the future.

Though it does not have a monopolistic hold on criticism, philosophy does have a special role to play: “[P]hilosophy is inherently criticism, having its distinctive position among various modes of criticism in its generality; a criticism of criticisms, as it were” (*Experience* 298). Dewey gives two different metaphors that together nicely convey the new role reserved for the philosopher-as-meta-critic. The first is the image of the philosopher as “a liaison officer between the conclusions of science and the modes of social and personal action through which attainable possibilities are projected and striven for” (*Quest* 248). Such a liaison officer has both a negative and a positive task. First, she must direct her critical mind against those obstacles that prevent and retard intelligent inquiry. This negative project involves revealing and attacking the domination of prejudice, habit, authority, and narrow interests. This negative destructive role is the counterpart to the philosopher’s positive task, which involves the creative and intelligent formulation of hypotheses that “are suggested by actual need, are bulwarked by knowledge already attained, and are tested by the consequences of the operations they evoke” (*Quest* 248). No longer constrained by the false problems and pretensions of the past, the philosopher is now free to formulate and test plans of action in the world of human experience.

The second metaphor is the philosopher as cartographer of human experience. A naturalistic philosophy that has embraced its critical function charts “a ground-map of the province of criti-

cism, establishing base lines to be employed in more intricate triangulations" (*Experience* 308-309). Such a ground-map allows others to re-trace the path taken, rectifying, extending, and confirming conclusions previously arrived at. It does not cover over the precarious and deny choice, but instead attempts to limit uncertainty and make choice less arbitrary. In this way, the results of past reflection and the material of first-hand experience come together as signposts to be used as humans get their bearings and make projections into the future.

Together, these two metaphors show that philosophy must become a critical enterprise that investigates, dissects, and ultimately re-constructs experience with an eye toward making experience more rich and meaningful. Philosophy can exist neither as a contemplative dwelling in absolutes, nor as an alternative to science and empirical analysis. Instead it must act as a linking mechanism that brings together the disparate aspects of experience in a way that reveals problems and helps humanity navigate the path toward solutions. While not overtly a call for revolution, Dewey pulls no punches in his attacks on the status quo. All aspects of life are to be submitted to experimental inquiry and intellectual action, with growth as the end to be pursued. The goal of philosophical thought and political action must be to alter conditions in the world such that thought prevails in ordinary experience.

Altering these conditions will be no easy matter, and it can only begin with alterations in the realm of education. The importance of education for Dewey cannot be over-stated. Dewey defines education in a way that makes it synonymous with growth: Education "is that reconstruction or reorganization of experience which adds to the meaning of experience, and which increases ability to direct the course of subsequent experience" (*Democracy* 83). More than this, the critical philosophy that is charged with making growth prevail in the world of experience is defined as "the general theory of education" (*Democracy* 338). The linking of education with growth and philosophy with education is no mere definitional turn of phrase, but is instead an attempt to completely change the essence of education and the role of the educator. Dewey's educational recommendations are vast, ranging from broad philosophical questions down to technical issues of curriculum development. The message that threads

throughout these recommendations is quite clear: Education must be made relevant and applicable to life in a democratic and industrial society. The school must be integrated into the larger realm of the community through directed and aim-driven occupational learning. In this kind of active-learning environment, students will develop the kind of critical sensibilities that will lead them not to simply accept the given structure of society, but alter it. Education is neither a preparation for some pre-determined future nor the mystical unfolding of latent potentialities. Instead, education must be understood as a continuous re-construction of experience that captures and hones the child's critical sense of the world, with an end-in-view of further education.

Given the importance of education to the process of growth, it is no exaggeration to say that political theory and political action are inevitably pedagogical. Dewey emphasizes education because he believes that the transformation of society must begin here. Dewey believes that it is only in this realm of education and socialization that real change can occur. It is in this early stage of life that an experimental and creative attitude is either inculcated or stunted in the citizenry of a community. The creation of such an attitude is of the utmost importance. It is only by cultivating intelligent inquiry that the economic system can be transformed such that "every person shall be occupied in something which makes the lives of others better worth living, and which accordingly makes the ties which bind persons together more perceptible" (*Experience* 326).

The focus on education as the means to social reform was a position that Dewey first developed in his early years at the University of Chicago. As early as 1896, Dewey outlined his pedagogic creed, claiming that the teacher "is a social servant set apart for . . . the securing of the right social growth The teacher always is the prophet of the true God and the usherer in of the true kingdom of God" ("My Pedagogic Creed" 95). While the religious terminology was for the most part dropped in later formulations, Dewey's commitment to education as key to social reform was life-long.

This turn to education as the way to accomplish social transformation was (and remains) a controversial move and Dewey's radical pedagogy provoked criticisms from both conservative and radical camps. While conservative critics have lamented Dewey's

lack of respect for traditional sources of intellectual authority (see Hutchins and Bloom), critics on the left made a more interesting and powerful claim: Dewey's theories may look good on paper, but they do not grapple with the extent to which education props up the status quo. In *The Agony of the American Left*, Christopher Lasch claims that progressives like Dewey "sought not so much to democratize the industrial system as to make it run more efficiently" (10). In his *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*, Richard Hofstadter offers an interesting variation of Lasch's critique. Hofstadter claims that Dewey unintentionally helped strengthen American anti-intellectualism. Though his theories speak at length of intelligent action, his educational theories do not provide proper guidance to teachers about the ends that they should actually pursue. In the absence of strong and directed adult authority, children became more susceptible to the influences of their peers and the mass media (374-375).

In order to understand how Dewey moves from a theory of education to a radical critique of the political and economic status quo, it is necessary to understand how his pedagogy fits into his larger critique. Dewey's theory of education is only one part of his larger attack on oppressive forms of authority that act as obstacles to intelligent action and an experimental attitude. This lifelong project ranges across a myriad of philosophical and political issues, from critiques of religious authority to a critique of the American idolatry of the Constitution. For the purpose of revealing how the notion of "growth" flies in the face of "Deweyism," I will focus on Dewey's economic critiques. It is here, in his stinging critiques and calls for "socialization," that the radical economic and political consequences of growth come fully into view.

DEWEY'S SOCIALISM

For Dewey, education is not simply a period of training spent in a formal school. While the aims, organization, and methods of such schooling are clearly an important part of education, education must be viewed as a life-long process. In this process, the educative agencies of society and workplace are as important as the schoolhouse (*Democracy* 7). Given this broad concept of education, it comes as no surprise that Dewey's pedagogical theories are intimately connected to the realm of economics. Education is

meant to serve the dual purposes of social adjustment and transformation, thus the prevailing economic conditions in society must be assessed and transformed if education is to meet the challenge of growth. As Dewey bluntly states it: "The problem of social readjustment is openly industrial, having to do with the relations of capital and labor" (*Democracy* 323). There is no magic change in either education or economics that will automatically bring about beneficial change: Education and economics will either stagnate and drift together or move forward together. An educational theory that embraces growth as the only end-in-itself can only develop alongside an economic system that encourages and cultivates the growth of the citizenry. Public schools will continue to produce "efficient industrial fodder and citizenship fodder" until there is an economic system that encourages an active and intelligent citizenry.

Dewey's theoretical analysis of America during the late 1920s and 1930s is best articulated in his *Individualism, Old and New*. In this work, Dewey points to the tension between the American philosophy of individualism and the corporatism of the American economy. Political, economic, and social mechanisms are becoming increasingly complex and interdependent, with an entire state apparatus oriented toward the protection of the interests of industry and commerce (*Individualism* 18-25). In this system, politicians and political parties act as "errand boys" of big business while individuals attempting to make sense of this world are mired in a bygone era rugged individualism ("John Dewey Assails the Major Parties" 442). The result of this situation is that as the world becomes increasingly interconnected, the individual finds herself lost and unable to find her bearings. Dewey captures this feeling in *The Public and its Problems*:

Men feel that they are caught in the sweep of forces too vast to understand or master. Thought is brought to a standstill and action paralyzed. Even the specialist finds it difficult to trace the chain of 'cause and effect'; and even he operates only after the event, looking backward, while meantime social activities have moved on to effect a new state of affairs. (135)

Not equipped with the kind of critical apparatus necessary for life in an industrial age, the individual is plunged into a state of extreme insecurity and anxiety. For those lucky enough to be employed, work becomes little more than coerced drudgery, submerging the individual's skill and capacity under the dead level

of mass production. The result is "a kind of monstrosity": an "animated machine" that seeks out in the realm of amusement and economic speculation the kind of satisfaction and engagement that is lacking in the workplace (*Democracy* 317). Dewey's image of this submerged individual is worth quoting at length:

The subordination of the enterprises to pecuniary profit reacts to make the workers "hands" only. Their hearts and brains are not engaged. They execute plans which they do not form, and of whose meaning and intent they are ignorant — beyond the fact that these plans make a profit for others and secure a wage for themselves . . . there is an undeniable limitation of opportunities, and minds are warped, frustrated, unnourished by their activities . . . The philosopher's idea of a complete separation of mind and body is realized in thousands of industrial workers, and the result is a depressed body and an empty and distorted mind. (*Individualism* 64)

With nothing to appeal to but an empty idea of "ragged" individualism and a choice of "individualism" or "socialism," the modern individual is completely lost. The choice is itself false; Dewey points to the fact that the United States was already on a path, in the early twentieth century, to socialism of one kind or another. The real choice to be made is "the choice between a socialism that is public and one that is capitalistic" (*Individualism* 58).

While it is clear that Dewey advocates a form of "public" socialism, it is notoriously difficult to unpack its precise form. Dewey's theory of inquiry, with its claim that ends are only experimental ends-in-view to be tested in the world, is antithetical to the kind of economic system-building that would make this task easy. The provisional nature of his economic critiques makes it very difficult to attach a label to his economic programs, and Dewey spent his life rejecting such easy labeling. Compounding this difficulty is Dewey's critique of the key concepts employed by economic radicals: "class" and "class conflict." While Dewey speaks at length of "workers" and "owners," he believes that the concept of class as Marxists use it involves the "indiscriminate lumping together" of complex phenomena (*Liberalism and Social Action* 55-57).² More than this, too much is demanded of the concept. While a discussion of class can illuminate and clarify the problems to be addressed, it is not an effective tool to be used when analyzing potential plans of action ("Class Struggle" 383).

Little insight can be gained by studying Dewey's shifting allegiances to powerful personalities of radical politics. Dewey readily admits the difficulty: "Upon the whole, the forces that have influenced me have come from persons and from situations more than from books . . . I seem to be unstable, chameleon-like, yielding one after another to many diverse and even incompatible influences; struggling to assimilate something from each" ("From Absolutism to Experimentalism" 155). These "persons and situations" that heavily influenced Dewey are many, including Jane Addams and Hull House, Henry George and the "single tax," the utopian novelist Edward Bellamy, Eugene Debs and the Pullman strike of 1894, the guild socialism of G.D.H. Cole, the "thought news" endeavor launched with Franklin Ford, and the fiery-tempered art-collector Albert Barnes. These individuals, situations, and theories share little common ground except for their commitment to radical politics and social experimentation. While clearly revealing Dewey's commitment to economic experimentation, these influences do little to clear up the type of socialism that would cultivate social growth.

Unfortunately, these difficulties have not stopped analysts from affixing ready-made labels to Dewey's economic theories. On the extremes, Dewey is referred to as a nihilist, totalitarian, or American Bolshevik by political conservatives and a social-fascist or petty-bourgeois apologist by radicals. Dewey himself uses a wide variety of labels to describe his position, though he consciously avoids the labels of Socialism and Communism because of the political baggage that accompanies such labels ("Why I Am Not a Communist" 91-95).

In the attempt to move beyond this empty process of merely affixing and combating labels, I will approach the question of Dewey's socialism by returning to the debate that gave rise to the Marxian critique of "Deweyism": the debate over Dewey's relationship to Marx.

KARL MARX — DEWEY'S UNLIKELY ALLY

My reconstruction of "growth" as end-in-itself paves the way for a new version of an old idea: a "red-pragmatic" synthesis of Marx and Dewey. As was the case when this project was first initiated in the 1920s and '30s by Max Eastman and Sidney Hook, such a synthesis must first address the fact that Dewey himself was a life-

long critic of Marx. Though Dewey's relationship with Marx is a natural starting point, actually outlining his critique of Marx is quite difficult. This is due not only to the fact that his critique is spread out over many works, but also to the fact that it is repetitive and often lumps complex ideas and concepts from different theorists into simplified wholes. Despite these difficulties, Jim Cork and James Farr give excellent summaries of Dewey's convoluted critique. In "John Dewey and Karl Marx," Jim Cork divides Dewey's criticism into three parts: Marx depends on "*a priori* concoctions," he denies the importance of human effort, and he claims for his system a deterministic and inevitable certainty (335-337). In "Engels, Dewey, and Marxism in America" James Farr reconstructs five principal Deweyan critiques: Marxist doctrine is "uniformitarian," "absolutistic," "positivistic," "monistic," and "monolithic" (277-281).

Though Dewey criticized Marx often, his criticisms apply only to the most simplified and dogmatic forms of Marxism, and even a cursory glance reveals intriguing methodological similarities linking Dewey to Marx. Both thinkers build from a critical appropriation of Hegel, replace claims of absolute knowledge with provisional knowledge-claims, and insist on testing their theoretical claims in the arena of human action. These points of contact have led a number of theorists to point to the close connections between Marx and Dewey, even after Max Eastman and Sidney Hook had abandoned the project they initiated to become founding fathers of American neo-conservatism. Jim Cork, for example, notes that both Marx and Dewey utilize a naturalistic method that recognizes the connection between philosophy and human practice. This recognition that philosophy deals in fallible truth claims allows both theorists to avoid the problematic dualisms of traditional philosophy (338-341). Richard Bernstein, in his *Praxis and Action*, expands upon the conceptual connection initially formulated by Cork. Bernstein argues that the close philosophical connections between Marx and Dewey result from their shared emphasis on the concept of "praxis." Both Dewey and Marx critiqued Hegel by shifting the orientation of their thought away from detached thinking and toward a form of philosophical anthropology that focuses on man as an active being who both shapes and is shaped by the material world (80-81). While most theorists focus on Marx and Dewey's philosophical

connections, Peter Manicas points to a political connection in "Philosophy and Politics: A Historical Approach to Marx and Dewey." While they disagreed on the agent of political change, Manicas shows that both Marx and Dewey were committed to gradualist politics resulting in a radical and humanistic form of democracy.

Unfortunately, though most have cast aside Novack and Dewey's simplistic charges of "imperialism" and "totalitarianism," theorists have not completely moved beyond the misunderstandings born from this polemical struggle. The continued presence of "Deweyism" becomes apparent when attempts are made to move from broad discussions of conceptual/political affinity to more focused discussions of how this affinity between Marx and Dewey is relevant to the politics of the present. Attempts to form a politically relevant "red-pragmatism" continue to run up against the orthodox Marxist view of a Dewey-the-reformist who stands in stark contrast to Marx-the-revolutionary.³ The persistence of Deweyism in these attempts can be seen in Richard Bernstein's claim that while Marx and Dewey share an emphasis on the concept of praxis, "Dewey's advocacy of liberal amelioration" is directly opposed to Marx's commitment to "genuine revolutionary praxis" (Bernstein, *Praxis* 80). Alfonso Damico agrees with Bernstein, but points to the issue of partisanship as that which most clearly reveals how Dewey's "problem solving" conflicts with Marx's "revolutionary praxis" (654). A third formulation of this same point is offered by James Campbell, who claims that while Marx valued "justice" over political process, for Dewey justice was divorced from, and secondary to, the process of securing "the participation of all individuals in the various political and economic decisions that influenced their lives" (137-138).

The foregoing analysis of Dewey's concept of growth has revealed both the origins and inaccuracies of the distinction between a "reformist" Dewey and "revolutionary" Marx. In dismantling this Cold War stumbling block, a red-pragmatism alliance for the twenty-first century must build from the similarities between Dewey's call for an economic and political system that encompasses "growth" and Marx's call for a system that emancipates humanity's "species being." In order to understand the form that such a red-pragmatism might take in confronting the challenges of the twenty-first century, I will begin with Dewey's

responses to the political and economic challenges of the early twentieth century. While the theoretical socialism that Dewey points to in works like *Individualism Old and New* is often obscure and open to competing interpretations, a look at his political activity during the Great Depression reveals what role Dewey can play in the political arena of the twenty-first century.

During the years of the Great Depression, Dewey used his writings, lectures, and organizing efforts to take his theories "down into the dirt and dust of the arena [to] fight for human rights in a practical, aggressive, realistic manner" (qtd. in Bordeau 78). Serving as both the chairman of the League for Independent Political Action (LIPA) and president of the People's Lobby, Dewey pushed for the creation of a third party that would formulate and implement the kind of radical economic restructuring needed to respond to the collapse of the American economy. Throughout the Hoover and Roosevelt administrations, Dewey used the *People's Lobby Bulletin* to attack the inactivity of Hoover and half-hearted reforms of Roosevelt. Dewey believed that the economic crises of the early twentieth century pointed to structural flaws in the system of capitalism, and he did not shy away from the radical policies that he believed were needed to address the economic crisis of the Great Depression. While Dewey dismissed the claim that class antagonism would lead inevitably to the violent overthrow of the status quo, a look at Dewey's *People's Lobby Bulletins* shows that he is not as far removed from Marx's politics as the conception of "Deweyism" implies. In fact, in responding to the economic challenges of the Great Depression through the *People's Lobby Bulletins*, Dewey endorsed all ten of the "despotic inroads against property" that Marx puts forward in *The Communist Manifesto* (490):

(1) *Abolition of property in land and application of all rents of land to public purposes*: Dewey always emphasized the importance of the land, claiming that until both the productivity and natural resources of this "final source of all productivity" are socialized, claims of equal opportunity in America will be nothing but "a farce and a tragedy" ("Socialization of Ground Rent" 256-257). To break the monopoly that the wealthy have over the land, Dewey turned to the single-tax program of Henry George, going so far as to say that attention to the works of George is the only

way that the nation can initiate a long-term economic recovery (“Steps to Economic Recovery” 63).

(2) *A heavy progressive or graduated income tax*: Dewey made constant appeals to Presidents Hoover and Roosevelt for a tax that would target the rich. He believed that “[e]qualization upwards from the low and downwards from the high incomes is the sole means which will fill empty stomachs” (“Full Warehouses and Empty Stomachs” 344), but quickly realized that private industry was unwilling (or unable) to undertake this vital task (“Voters Must Demand” 392). While he recognized that taxation was no substitute for economic planning, he realized that such a tax was “an inherent and vitally important part of a socialized economy” (“Taxation as a Step to Socialization” 265-267).

(3) *Abolition of all rights of inheritance*, (4) *Confiscation of property of all emigrants and rebels*, (5) *Equal liability of all to work*: While Dewey did not discuss the property of “emigrants and rebels” and only made passing comments about increasing taxes on inheritances, he did believe that when property rights interfere with human rights, human rights must prevail (*Freedom* 123-124). Toward this end, society must be arranged such that all of its inhabitants work in a way that fosters their growth. This will have different effects for the different classes of society. For the poor, the state must both guarantee equal opportunity and address the dehumanizing conditions of the workplace. The goal is to make work as stimulating as possible to the capacities of the worker (“Asks Federal Funds to Aid Unemployed” 435). For the wealthy “parasites . . . who live upon the work of others without rendering a return” (“The Teacher and the Public” 158-159), work must be made mandatory by relieving them “entirely of their gorged excess” that allows them to live off of the work of others (“Steps to Economic Recovery” 64).

(6) *Centralization of credit in the hands of the state by means of a national bank with an exclusive monopoly*; (7) *Centralization of the means of communication and transport in the hands of the state*: Dewey makes frequent appeals for the socialization of means of transportation, communication, and finance. Like Marx, he points to the disastrous results of allowing things like the press, railroads, and financial institutions to be subordinate to profit mechanisms. The only way to right the ship of the economy is to have a kind of public ownership company, in which “the people

through their government take over the basic agencies upon which industry and commerce depend" ("America's Public Ownership Program" 285).

(8) *Extension of factories and instruments of production owned by the state*; (9) *Combination of agriculture with manufacturing industries*. Like Marx, Dewey embraces the incredible power of machinery, seeing it as the productive foundation upon which a new social order can be built. Retreat to a romanticized pre-industrial past is not an option; society must instead wrest this "undreamed-of reservoir of power" away from those who desire only profit, and put it to work toward the expansion of human capacity (*Individualism* 47). Use of machinery must be extended and directed toward growth and distanced from an outdated conception of "rugged" individualism if it is ever to be humanity's ally.

(10) *Free education for all children in public works, abolition of children's factory labour in its present form. Combination of education with industrial production*: It is here that Dewey's program of "growth" and Marx's program of "emancipation" are most closely and clearly related. As previously discussed, Dewey was a lifelong advocate for expanded educational opportunities, including vocational education. For Dewey, there was no clear dividing line separating his political, economic, and pedagogical theories. Dewey viewed the LIPA and People's Lobby as educational institutions that clarified, focused, and directed the often turbulent emotions let loose by the collapse of the American economy. Though the LIPA failed in its ultimate goal of creating a viable third party alternative to Roosevelt, this educational mission should not be underestimated. Beyond sponsoring and helping to elect many third-party candidates at both the state and federal level, the LIPA helped to educate the public about the financial collapse, focusing public anger and showing the need for expanded governmental control in the American economy.

The LIPA's "Four-Year Presidential Plan," developed at their 1932 national convention, provides concrete political form to the ideas that Dewey (the LIPA chairman) was publishing in his role as president of the People's Lobby. The plan:

. . . was bolder and went further than the New Deal . . . it asked for three to five million dollars for public works and \$250,000,000 for direct relief annually. The plan called for an increase in taxation on higher-bracket incomes, and recommended larger corporation and inheritance taxes; in addition, the plan advocated the estab-

ishment of worker's insurance, old age pension, the abolition of child labor, and a six-hour workday. The program supported public ownership of power, utilities, coal, oil, the railroad, and advocated a reduction of the tariff rates and aid to farmers. (Bordeau 74)

While Dewey rejected attempts to label his economic vision, and Norman Thomas (the socialist candidate endorsed by the LIPA) called the program "ideologically impotent," it is clear that an economic system that adopts growth as its end will be a socialist system. In a line that resonates with both the political radicalism of the *Manifesto* and the economic realities of the twenty-first century, Dewey proclaims that "[t]he people will rule when they have power, and they will have power in the degree they own and control the land, banks, the producing and distributing agencies of the nation" ("Imperative Need: A New Radical Party" 76). Dewey does not retreat from the radical consequences of growth, claiming that "[t]here is no half-way house for America . . . Only elimination of profits through socialization will prevent eventual chaos" ("No Half-Way House for America" 289-290).

CONCLUSION – TENTATIVE STEPS IN A NEW DIRECTION

My argument in this paper has shown that, far from a supporter of the status-quo, Dewey is pushing for a radically new form of living-together. Those who ascribe to Dewey a system of "Dewey-ism" have passed over the concept of growth, and thus passed over the radical consequences of his political theory. By positing growth as the only end-in-itself, Dewey found a guiding ideal by which to critique existing social, economic, and political institutions. These institutions must be deconstructed, analyzed, and built anew. The end of growth demands that these institutions become a kind of institutionalized humanism that embraces experimentation and intelligent action in all aspects of life.

Beyond resolving the disconnect that brought a twentieth-century "Deweyism" to bear on the twenty-first-century world, this analysis of Dewey's concept of growth reveals the pressing need for political theorists to re-open the investigation of Marx and Dewey's political connection. A twenty-first century form of "red-pragmatism" that brings the best of Dewey together with the best of Marx will offer not only a compelling vision of a more humane society, but the weapons with which the struggle for such a world

can be waged. I believe that such a theoretical comportment is vitally necessary, as we are once again in a situation of political and economic uncertainty. Amidst financial collapse and insecurity, a straw-man caricature of "socialism" has re-emerged on the political scene to threaten "freedom," revealing the weakness of the nineteenth century "rugged individualism" that we still use to make sense of a twenty-first-century global economy.

While a full articulation of such a red-pragmatic theoretical comportment lies far outside the scope of this paper, I will conclude my analysis of Dewey's radicalism with three tentative steps in this new direction:

1) *Realign Political Theory and Political Practice*. A red-pragmatism that is fit for the political and economic realities of the twenty-first century must begin with the task that Dewey laid out in the opening pages of *Individualism Old and New*: The re-aligning of political theory with political reality. More than another Dewey-an (or Marx-ian) call for political theory to be experimental and focused on consequences, this task involves banishing once and for all the specter of "socialism" that continues to haunt the (primarily American) political imagination. In a century already characterized by economic collapse and a multi-billion dollar bailout of global financial institutions, fears of socialism simply have no place. The political and economic choice that we face is not one between "socialism" and a "free market," but rather is a choice over what kind of socialism we should develop. A red-pragmatism for the twenty-first century would continue the project initiated by Marx in the mid-nineteenth century and continued by Dewey during the Great Depression of the twentieth century — the struggle to articulate and construct, through both academic and political praxis, a new set of political/economic institutions. Rather than continue the process of bailing out the status-quo "private profit socialism," we need to invest in the educational, political, and economic institutions that will serve as the foundation of a more democratic and egalitarian "public socialism."

2) *Move beyond Revolution vs. Reform*: In "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte," Marx compares the swiftness of bourgeois revolutions to the slow moving, self-critical, and thorough "old mole" of proletarian revolution (606). Later Marx-ists assumed that this "old mole" undermined the foundations of the

status-quo by moving from the margins to the center, such that revolutionary change from within the institutions of the state was impossible. This distinction between revolutionary action from the margins and reform from the center came to form the central tenet of the Marxist critique of Dewey. While the claim that Marx took this position in the 19th century has been challenged by pointing to Marx's own thoughts on the prospects for a democratic transition to socialism and his high praise of English factory inspectors, the global institutions of the twenty-first century are certainly no longer tethered to such a simple dichotomy. A twenty-first-century red-pragmatism must take its cues from the "revolutionary reformism" of Marx and Dewey themselves. Both Marx and Dewey used power, political organization, and pressure to exploit every political opening that presented itself, working from both within and outside of the state to achieve a more humane political and economic order.

3) *A focus on education, rightly understood*: The articulation and creation of a "public socialism" to replace the status quo will require the kind of intelligent, critical, and engaged citizens that only a reformed educational sphere will create. Though they approach the issue of education with differing agendas and thus different emphases, both Marx and Dewey push for an educational experience immersed in the lived experience of students, an education that creates consciously engaged citizens ready to act in (and ultimately change) the world. In fact, there has been something of a renaissance of interest in Marx and Dewey's educational theories. This renewed attention to the pedagogical insights of both Marx and Dewey has led to a variety of fruitful discussions, including discussions on the proper role of market forces in education, the place of the public school in the broader community, and the democratization of the University. It is imperative, however, that educational reform not be discussed as though it exists in a socio-economic vacuum. Changes in educational institutions will only take root if they are understood as inherently linked to changes in economic institutions. Thus, this first step in articulating a twenty-first-century red-pragmatism is informed by the best of both Marx and Dewey: Marx's focus on the economic basis of educational institutions adds a much needed dimension to Dewey's educational theory. Far from a point of departure in which Dewey is embraced and Marx cast

aside, it is here, in the realm of education, that a red-pragmatism must begin.

NOTES

1. An emphasis on growth as the end of action is not a new development, but is instead the culmination of Dewey's naturalized Hegelianism. In his early ethical writings Dewey focused on "acts (which) tend to expand, invigorate, harmonize, and in general organize the self" (*The Study of Ethics* 244). While these early writings clearly contain an emphasis on the enlargement of human experience, they are still dependent on an organic conception of society, which Dewey later critiqued (ironically enough) as overly supportive of the status quo (*Reconstruction* 189-190).
2. Despite this critique, Dewey frequently employs the concept of class in his writings. For example, in his essay entitled "Imperative Need: A Radical Party" Dewey unleashes a class-based polemical attack: "Why have power and rule passed from the people to a few? Everybody knows who the few are, and the class-status of the few answers the question. . . . They are an oligarchy of wealth. They rule over us because they control banks, credit, the land, and big organized means of production" (76).
3. One clear exception to this trend is the work of Christopher Phelps, whose *Young Sidney Hook* and "Flexibility and Revolution" point to the radical potential of a red-pragmatism informed by both Dewey and Marx.

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