
Democracy & Education

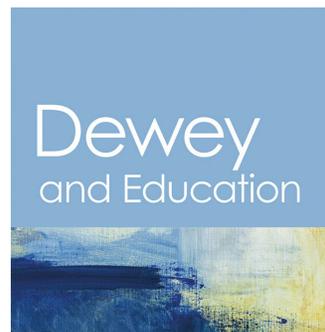
Dewey and Our Present Purposes

A Review of *Dewey and Education*

Eli Orner Kramer (Department of Philosophy of Culture, Institute of Philosophy, University of Warsaw)

Scholarship, by its strict attention to accepted methodologies, is superficially conservative of belief. But its tone of mind leans towards a fundamental negation. For scholars the reasonable topics in the world are penned in isolated regions, this subject-matter or that subject-matter. Your thorough-going scholar resents the airy speculation which connects his own patch of knowledge with that of his neighbor. He finds his fundamental concepts interpreted, twisted, modified. He has ceased to be king of his own castle, by reason of speculations of uncomfortable generality, violating the very grammar of his thoughts. (Whitehead, 1961, p. 108)

ALFRID NORTH WHITEHEAD, a philosophical contemporary and admirer of Dewey, cut straight to the heart of why it is risky to ask historians of philosophy such as myself to review the speculative, reconstructive work of philosophers attempting to renew philosophical ideas of the past for our present purposes. That is to say, I, in my historical mode, turn blinders to a great deal of research (this is what Whitehead means by “a fundamental negation”) in order to pay close attention on a particular philosophical period. In my case, I am a specialist in the history of American philosophy, from the philosophies of First Nation peoples and Puritan colonialists, to classical American pragmatism and Boston personal idealism. I recognize and accept that this scholastic attitude is a restriction on myself. I have a conservative adherence to the lifeworld and aims of Dewey in context of his own thought. Yet at the same time, as a



Walter
Feinberg

Routledge Key Ideas in Education PARTNER

good Deweyan, I believe all good history is present-oriented (genealogical). Further, a good Deweyan recognizes that philosophical reconstructions of history have a special license for creative reinterpretation in order to better engage and meet the needs of the present. Philosophers of education take this call most seriously; philosophy is and has to respond to the needs of people in their development (education) in concrete experience. I am thus often conflicted when

approaching texts meant to engage a broad audience (beyond the narrow needs of the historical scholar), wanting fidelity of interpretation on one hand while recognizing the need for new kinds of stories and reconstructions on the other.

Walter Feinberg, as a leading philosopher of education, is all too keenly aware of the need for a new “progressive education” movement that continues Dewey’s reconstructive work without

ELI KRAMER is the Director of Research on the project, “The History, Philosophy, Politics, and Practice of the Liberal Arts,” funded by The New American Baccalaureate Non-Profit, and hosted as an Affiliated Research Project of the Department of Philosophy of Culture, Institute of Philosophy, University of Warsaw. He, alongside Dr. Aaron Stoller, is the coeditor of *Contemporary Philosophical Proposals for the University: Toward a Philosophy of Higher Education*.

letting our adherence to past thought blind us from questioning and reinterpreting Dewey's ideas for our present purposes. In his new book, *Dewey and Education*, Feinberg (2018) offers an important, clear, and concise proposition. He offers a new Deweyan social imaginary for the present needs of educators, from teachers, students, and administrators, to community organizers and educational theorists. What understandably gets left by the wayside sometimes is close care and attention to Dewey's full philosophical context. My task in this review then is to largely focus on the power of Feinberg's reconstruction of Dewey for education today, and ways we might further advance it. At the same time, my second authorial voice will leave signposts on the wayside for those interested in thorough, nuanced, and careful attention to Dewey's own views embedded within his own context.

Feinberg (2018) begins his story by accounting in the preface for his own engagement with Dewey. As an exemplary educational reformer committed to questions of political life and social justice, Feinberg has had a deep and sometimes critical relationship with Dewey. His doctoral dissertation, *A Comparative Study of the Social Philosophies of John Dewey and Bernard Bosanquet*, was concerned with the questions of "social pluralism" and "political legitimacy" (Feinberg, 2018, p. ix), a theme he has continued to explore throughout his career. In so doing, he has expanded an area where Dewey is often felt as lacking; how to include in one's philosophy, and in particular one's philosophy of education, more nuanced readings of how power often prohibitively limits certain people from being considered legitimate actors in democratic life. In the 1970s, Feinberg did his own important historical work exploring the foundations of 20th-century liberal education (Feinberg, 1974) in order to better understand the successes and limits of liberal and progressive education for our present needs today.

The stars shined brightly on Feinberg when he went to acquire his graduate education at the philosophy department of Boston University (BU). Under personalists like Peter Bertocci, and Deweyans (his dissertation readers) like Marx Wartofsky and Kenneth Benne, Feinberg was introduced to two figures who would become important to him in his later work: Hegel and Dewey. Feinberg's department had been greatly shaped by three generations of Boston personalism, though by the time he got there, the department had already pluralized its specialties. Boston personalism was not, as Feinberg put it, a movement that primarily "[g]rew out of the Methodist Church (Feinberg, 2018, p. xv) and was "concerned with the problem of evil" nor simply with explaining "why a benevolent God allowed evil to exist" (Feinberg, 2018, p. xvii). Boston personalism is an American philosophical tradition as old as pragmatism that is quite Hegelian in nature, which shares a close methodological orientation with radical empiricism (their method was often referred to as "rational empiricism"). It was, in fact, a full philosophy, one that often included a theology, but was much larger than that. To provide my own (greatly simplified summary), personalists, including the Boston school, think that the area of life we spend the most attention and care on is the personal. From family, friends, and romantic relationships, when someone says, "This is personal to me," they reveal what is of primary value in life. Given that the

personal is what we value when we value, personalists think it is the place to start one's philosophy and life practice, and it suggests something about the nature of the world we live in (though personalists disagree with each other on just what exactly it reveals). Boston personalism is unique for drawing on the same roots as pragmatism, including many of its founders attending the same "Metaphysical Club" discussions. Even in the case of its theology, Boston personalism was often quite peculiar. For example, in the case of E. S. Brightman (Martin Luther King Jr.'s mentor at BU), it included an account of God as in time and finite, but infinitely suffering and feeling alongside persons striving and struggling for a better world. Its long-standing relationship with pragmatism has been well explored and documented, with most of the latter's major figures, excluding Dewey, identifying as personalists (see Pihlström, 2004; Williams and Bengtsson, 2018). Pope John Paul II himself was part of a long-standing tradition of Catholic personalism and was in fact a well-regarded Max Scheler (another personalist) scholar. The fact that both Martin Luther King Jr. and John Paul II were personalists reveals in itself the full significance of a point Feinberg makes about his own graduate education: "In any event, it was clear that I was drawn to philosophy in part because I believe that ideas mattered in practice, and so did a number of the BU Professors" (Feinberg, 2018, p. xvii). Feinberg was part of a department and broader institution with a long history of seeing philosophy (both personalist and pragmatist) as grounded and having a duty toward the concrete world of human personal affairs. These departments, as with the pragmatists at the University of Chicago and the naturalists at Columbia University, were critical in supporting and cultivating leaders like Feinberg. They gave them the opportunity to support philosophy as something that can "make a difference that makes a difference." Feinberg, even more than he suggests, is the legacy of a generation of leaders in philosophy. As we shall see, his own views were largely shaped by the transition from this older generation of scholars to a younger one, putatively far more cynical about American political life and social action.

In giving his own account of Dewey in the context of the older "liberalisms" popular among philosophers such as his teachers at BU, and as developing in the 20th century, Feinberg notes that

... Dewey did not accept the Marxist view that violent revolution was the best way to achieve meaningful change, and his ideas on education can be read in part as a response to Marx's idea that the proletariat through violent revolution would service as the agent of effective advancement." (Feinberg, 2018, xiii)

Here we get the first of several important strategic reinterpretations. As Cornel West and other philosophers and historians have noted, Dewey never closely read, or really even properly skimmed, the works of Marx (West, 1989). Further, Dewey, up through the Pullman Strike in Chicago (1894) and World War I, had an ambivalent relationship with the role of violence. Jane Addams was one of many voices that shifted him in another direction. Nevertheless, in spirit, Feinberg points to something important: Dewey, as in contrast with many critical theorists today, largely rejected violence as an important ameliorative tool for cultural

advancement. Dewey is in this sense a conservative, and the Deweyan ameliorative spirit is deliberative, slow, and augmentative; he was also then not an optimist in the power of our reason and free will to augment culture quickly (at least most of the time) (see Vannatta, 2014). In further framing the liberalism popular in Dewey's (and his own) generations, Feinberg notes that Dewey, unlike the existentialists, never fully rejected "the basic assumption of the Enlightenment that human knowledge was limitless . . ." (Feinberg, 2018, p. xix). But as previously mentioned, Dewey's melioristic, largely nonviolent approach to social change was grounded in his doubts about the limits of human reason. Perhaps it would be better said that Dewey preferred to highlight the capacity of humans to reconstruct richer democratic communities, an emphasis that at times Feinberg rightly casts doubt upon. The more important and general point Feinberg wants to make, and that the historian of philosophy in me ought to listen to, is that Dewey's "optimism," grounded in the social optimism of the American social imaginary in the early 20th century, is no longer tenable for us. I will come back to this point later; suffice to say it is important to note that Dewey described his philosophy as "ameliorative" and not optimistic for a reason, one grounded in his Hegelian antirationalist stand on the activity of reason. This stance shaped his view of the philosopher's normative role in society.

Another point on which the historian of philosophy in me must respond to is on Louis Menand's account of the origins of pragmatism as arising "partly as a response to the massive destruction brought about by the Civil War" (Feinberg, 2018, p. xxii), on which Feinberg relies. Although the statement itself is entirely credible, it is worth noting that Menand far over emphasizes the Civil War's role in the formation of pragmatism. Menand's work on the subject, *The Metaphysical Club* (Menand, 2002), has been thoroughly criticized in the classical American philosophy scholarship (see Auxier, 2006; Juffras, 2001). Thus, although Feinberg is right that the Civil War greatly shaped early American philosophers, it is by no means the primary force in its inception. Now, it is fair for Feinberg to generalize and place classical American pragmatism into a broader American narrative. But not surprisingly, historical nuances get abstracted, glossed over, or simply ignored. The inception of pragmatism in figures like C. S. Peirce had largely philosophical origins, ones that had meaningful implications for the post-Civil War world but that were not caused by the war itself. Again, I find however that Feinberg's overall point is valid: America is neither politically nor philosophically in the mood of reconstruction as it was after the Civil War. Civic culture is constantly being undermined, and we are on the brink of ecological collapse. The mood is not one that can easily be identified with a "rebuilding" of social imaginary (at least not yet), which pragmatism utilized to its great advantage.

Despite my scholarly and sometimes pedantic quibbles, I think the book is timely and important. Feinberg offers a critical, nuanced, and approachable usage of Deweyan philosophy toward a "new progressive education" movement. As Dewey did in his *Democracy and Education*, Feinberg adeptly frames the very project of the book in his own description of the purpose of philosophy of education: "This is why, as I have suggested

elsewhere, philosophy of education is first and foremost a street philosophy. It begins, as Dewey would note, with the felt needs and common concerns that develop out of the everyday experiences of people" (Feinberg, 2018, p. 2). Feinberg's task in the book is to explore what ideas of Dewey's might serve the common experiences and concerns of people today, especially in terms of their own (educational) development. His chapter one, "Introduction," outlines his project in the book: to offer a clear vision of Dewey's philosophy, and educational theory and practice, selecting aspects of Dewey's work and highlighting perceived weaknesses in the effectiveness of Dewey's ideas for today, including, for example, as they participated in the 19th century's naïve scientific, progressive optimism and blind loyalties. His work is a sort of philosophical and personal genealogy of where Deweyan progressive ideas and education have been and where they ought to go to serve as a "street philosophy."

Feinberg expands on the origins of what might be called Dewey's own "street philosophy" in chapter two, "Influences on Dewey and the Development of Pragmatism." He starts the chapter by highlighting that

. . . Dewey was more than an armchair philosopher or a disconnected educational theorist, and he was much more than a pundit. He was, perhaps more than any of these, even before the term was coined, a public intellectual who took on the issues of his day, such as war, depression and immigration, addressing them in the popular media as well as in academic publications. He was a philosopher who was willing to get his hands dirty and enter into the fray of political and social debate. And get his hands dirty he surely did. (Feinberg, 2018, p. 15)

Feinberg is a good reader of Dewey's philosophy, especially its Hegelian and Darwinian elements, and how Dewey reconstructed those philosophies for his own purposes (see, for example, Feinberg, 2018, pp. 19–20). He also offers a clear and respectable account of James's and Peirce's influence on Dewey, though much more obviously could be said, especially about the influence of Peirce on Dewey's later works.

The heart of the book can be found in chapter three, "Dewey's Philosophy," and chapter four, "Dewey on Education," which are expertly written, showing the skill and sensitivity of a senior Dewey scholar. In "Dewey's Philosophy," Feinberg traces the all-too-often ignored but essential thread to understanding Dewey's philosophy: "The idea of meaning links the disparate elements of his philosophy" (Feinberg, 2018, p. 39). Unlike most modern takes on Dewey, with tired arguments trying to bend and warp Dewey to fit the narrow needs of analytic epistemology, leading to endless and unhelpful arguments about Dewey's theory of truth, Feinberg goes to what is at the heart of Dewey's work (even his logic): the creation, development, and intensification of meaningful experiences for human creaturely life. "A major task of Dewey and other pragmatists is to understand how confusion turns to meaningful order, not only for infants, but for all of us. For Dewey, we understand the meaning of something, we see its connection to other things and to a human purpose" (Feinberg, 2018, p. 40). This task includes not only reflecting on the human

ability to bring meaningful order to living in and with the world but teasing out what the human ability to coordinate meaning tells us about the nature of the world. Knowing the role of meaning as a part of nature undergirds Dewey's most central work: "Dewey is most interested in the function of meaning in expanding the control and predictability of human experience and in enabling people to control the connection between an event and the enjoyment or suffering that follows from that event" (Feinberg, 2018, p. 52). In other words, Dewey was interested in helping us find a receptive engagement with our natural environment so that we can learn how to live ever more meaningfully with and through it.

Throughout this chapter, Feinberg adroitly articulates for a broad audience some of the complex nuances of Dewey's philosophy. He leads us from Dewey's use of radical empiricism and theory of conceptual formation, to his ecological standpoint and moral theory. He also explores how Dewey might be compared to modern theorists, from Chomsky to Rawls. That said, I again must mention a quibble. It is a shame that Feinberg does not reference Dewey's 1932 *Ethics* (Dewey, 1987) in his section on Dewey's moral philosophy, as I believe it best speaks to the kinds of criticisms Feinberg gives of his ethics, such as that Dewey commits a mild version of the naturalistic fallacy¹ (Feinberg, 2018, p. 61). Again, despite my small protestations, Feinberg's overall point still stands its ground: that Dewey's progressivist narrative of social progress does not well fit our own social imaginary (Feinberg, 2018, p. 69).

In chapter four, "Dewey on Education," besides going over Dewey's normative view of what the school ought to be for society in his time and running through a number of important Deweyan distinctions between education and schooling, Feinberg contextualizes Dewey within not only the progressive education movement but the state of education at the time Dewey wrote his work. He reminds us that Dewey started writing about education before it was compulsory in all U.S. states and as it was just beginning to adjust to the industrial age. In a time when more and more Americans moved from rurally rooted communities or immigrated from Europe, East Asia, and elsewhere to uprooted American city life, Dewey thought the school had a special contextual role to play. For "Dewey feared too that without an educational transformation, children would not develop a meaningful connection to a larger community, and that subject matter taught just for its own sake without regard to their real-life function would be too abstract to be meaningful" (Feinberg, 2018, p. 75). The role of the school was, in an industrial society, to provide the soil for meaningful growth, a role once played by largely agrarian community settings and now that could be catalyzed by the opportunity for conjoint communication across difference in diverse city life. The school was to be a site for meaning making by and through our

differences. It would be a site for the transformation of education, society, and culture at large. Feinberg fairly points out that although we still have warrant to see the school as a site of social change, there is now ever more reason to question whether it can be the central source for much needed cultural transformation. Feinberg then takes us through a good review of what primary schools were like in Dewey's day, and what Dewey's Laboratory School at the University of Chicago aimed to do in light of that situation.

In order to illuminate how Dewey's educational theory was meant to work in the new school as "social center" of industrial society, Feinberg offers a variety of helpful examples, from personal stories in the classroom and of learning to ski, to reflecting on the movie *Hidden Figures*. Through such examples, he carefully covers important nuances in Dewey's approach to education. For example:

Once in the 1980s when I was doing research in Japan, I visited an English class in a high-pressure Japanese cram school that helps students pass the entrance examination for a high-prestige university. The class had about 300 students, all men, each one sitting in a neat row with the teacher, almost invisible, behind a high podium in the front of the room. Most all of the class was conducted in Japanese, except for a few English phrases that the instructor muttered once in a while, for example: "Step in the bus"; "step out of the car." I doubt whether the students were learning more than a technical understanding of arcane features of grammar. The contrast was a small class of a dozen or so women training to be lower-level secretaries or travel agents. Their classroom was nicely carpeted and cozy, and the students were all engaging in discussing in English an American novel. These students were not only learning English. There were also learning to appreciate it as a mode of expression and communication. (Feinberg, 2018, p. 86)

One of the nuances of Dewey's approach to education that this example suggests is that the point of what is now called student-centered education for Dewey was not that students controlled curriculum and that the teacher had no expertise in guiding the subject matter in relation to student interest. Rather, it was meant to point out that "[t]he teacher needs to understand the logic of the subject, but not *just* from the point of view of the expert, but also from the logic and interest of the students" (Feinberg, 2018, p. 87). The point is not to pontificate on one's expertise but for it to serve, as it did for the small classroom of women Feinberg visited (at least from what he could gather from such a cursory visit to a classroom culture he was not familiar with as an American), students' lived engagement and development with the material. The teacher is centered on the growth of the students in finding the meaning of English as a mode of expression and communication for their lives, not on having the students amass linguistic information.

Despite these concrete examples, Feinberg does sometimes err toward overintellectualizing Dewey's philosophy. In some of these cases, a closer reading of Dewey's pragmatic forbearers would clarify some misconceptions. For example, Feinberg claims that "Dewey does not say a great deal about how doubt is developed except to note that it arises out of a problematic situation, but

1 One might also look at Dewey's criticism of the naturalistic fallacy (and why he moved beyond it) in *Democracy and Education* (Dewey, 2008a, pp. 97–99) where he surveyed the 19th century's turn to naturalism (Dewey, 2008a). For a thorough defense of Deweyan moral philosophy see Pappas, 2008.

it is unlikely that doubt just arises naturally. Problematic situations have to be recognized as problematic before doubt occurs” (Feinberg, 2018, p. 88). Dewey does try to substantiate and articulate how doubt works as a sign of a problematic situation, which arises naturally, in works as varied as *Democracy and Education* and *Experience and Nature* (Dewey, 1981, chs. 1–2).

He also clearly drew on Peirce’s own account of doubt as in the *Fixation of Belief* (Peirce, 1877). As that work makes clear, doubt does, in fact, occur naturally all the time and without being fully recognized and utilized by our intelligence. I walk out the door, and I trip on the first step out of the house. I then take two steps forward to regain my balance. Now, I might be too busy to think about it and recognize it in a way that would avoid future tripping situations. I also might attribute it to the work of fate vying against me. After all, my horoscope said I would hurt myself today. I might in such a way fix (as in stabilize or put in place) the belief and arrest the doubt. For Peirce and Dewey, doubts are not merely cognitive recognition of a problem in such a way as to fix it. Yes, doubt does incite intellectual reaction, but I could fix my belief in all sorts of dogmatic ways in order to continue my passive habits of walking out the door. I could then continue to trip several times a week on that step.

Feinberg’s point is that for “. . . education to advance, satisfaction must be destabilized to a certain extent. Here is where the teacher’s role as a bridge between the novice and the expert comes into play. Part of the function of teaching is to destabilize satisfaction by encouraging the student to explore the limitations of the practice that brings satisfaction (Feinberg, 2018, p. 88). A bigger implication is that we (Dewey included) are prone to miss problematic aspects of the world unless we challenge ourselves (and our students) to recognize them as real problems. We all too easily dismiss our doubts about uneasy topics, like cultural injustice, and let ourselves continue to be satisfied with our current practices. Systematic racism in the form of the U.S. prison industrial complex might not be recognized as a problem for those in privilege. Thus, it can go on being a problem only for minority communities entrapped by it, who really experience it, and not for others who can go about their daily affairs while being able to maintain all sorts of blinders to it and perhaps even reaping the rewards of the practice. But here is just the point for the pragmatist: We have all sorts of problematic situations that we fix with dogmatic judgments, or have not responded to with our full intelligence in other ways, or that are not “live” events for us as we have not rubbed up against them in significant ways. The challenge is not simply to *intellectually* recognize a problematic situation but to help students “rub against” it as a real problem, and as the kind of problem that needs intelligence to arrest the doubt.

My point is to underscore the difference between having students talk about problems, let us say, bullying in school, versus having them as a community of inquiry feel it for themselves and then see if they can reduce it in their school. Here is where diversity is essential for the pragmatist. Without students with live experiences of bullying and teaching other students how to be receptive to that experience as “live” and “real,” the experience has no opportunity to become of meaningful use to all. Diversity is

essential for advancing knowledge, and that is just what Dewey hoped a diverse school would do for the previously homogenous communities of late-19th- and early-20th-century America. In such classrooms, students will not simply recognize but learn to experience a more distant problem from their lived experience as still live and real, and hit the resistance of experience when attempting to ameliorate it. They will hit what Peirce called the “secondness” of the world. The world as filled with troublesome facts. Just telling other kids bullying is bad is not enough for the world of fact: what kids do despite what their peers tell them. Here is a chance for intelligence. The trick is to support the students in not falling back on dogmatic ways to fix their beliefs. Here is where Feinberg is right on point: We do not just want to make students problem-solvers but *intelligent/good* problem-solvers.

Feinberg goes over many other important topics throughout the book, including Dewey’s conception of Democracy, challenges to it, and what we might take from it today. Overall, the same important larger problematic is repeated: Dewey’s social imaginary does not fit our age of distrust and does not dig deeply enough into the systematic problems that will get ignored by privileged democratic groups.

The book culminates in chapter five, “Toward a New Progressive Educational Movement.” In his own reconstruction of Dewey’s philosophy, Feinberg “. . . suggests ways in which a renascent progressive education could contribute to the construction of those habits of mind and character . . .” (Feinberg, 2018, p. 103), which are, as he quotes from Dewey directly, “to aid in producing . . . the intellectual and moral patterns, that are somewhat near even with the actual movement of events” (Feinberg, 2018, as quoted on p. 103). In other words, how can we use Dewey to initiate a new educational movement that can democratically reconstruct the present for a better future? For Feinberg, Dewey’s participation in a social imaginary of optimistic social progress, trust in American democratic national identity (and at least somewhat in the state), and faith in the ability of the school (broadly construed) to be the central force of social reconstruction, was always problematic, and is now no longer a “live option” for a revitalized progressive education movement. He also points to ongoing concerns with Dewey’s view of diversity and American homogenization and his inadequate attention to (and sometimes even silence on) questions of race, gender, and identity.

The vision we get is of an optimistic philosopher, with painful blinders given his privilege, who held a social imaginary that is no longer helpful for our needs. Since the 1960s, Feinberg believes we have moved from a social imaginary of optimism to one of suspicion. For Feinberg, this transition is no mere historical description—it is something he lived through as a young person and later as an academic committed to activism.

This was the real dividing point between Dewey’s generation and those that followed mine. I was in the middle, having internalized much that Dewey had also internalized—the promise of public education for a more inclusive, more democratic society, and yet I was also standing outside of Dewey’s generation and questioning much

that it took for granted—including the belief that schooling could achieve greater equality by itself. (Feinberg, 2018, p. 111)

To flesh out his point about what we need to leave behind in Dewey, in the middle of the chapter, he adeptly brings us to a piece of personal biography. This brief section is about his first reading, and his views today, on Dewey's participation in the Polish Study, a study of the loyalty of a Polish community in Philadelphia to the U.S. during World War I (Feinberg, 2018, pp. 114–115). Feinberg rightly criticizes Dewey's misplaced trust in the American government's motivations for war and his participation in the study that put at risk this community of immigrants. It was not as if everyone was duped by the sinister elements of the war. Other more "suspicious" pragmatists, like Dewey's student Randolph Bourne, were critical of the war from the beginning and had it out with Dewey in public debates. Dewey, with full blinders on, supported a disastrous war. It is this kind of optimism (in line with an optimistic social imaginary of solidarity) that Feinberg thinks we can do without.

While Feinberg certainly thinks we should adopt Dewey's approach to practicing philosophy of education, and his approach to the relationship between thought and action, Feinberg also thinks we should be more mindful and critical of the unjust behavior of society at large, all while being open to more confrontational and less academic, community-based responses to the problematic situations of social life. Further, Feinberg thinks we should have no illusions that the formal school can, by itself, be the site of social progress. The point is to reuse Dewey toward a broader and messier method of progressive education reform. This conclusion is entirely warranted and indeed is duly pragmatic. As Feinberg notes of his own work: "My criticism of Dewey is itself a part of the pragmatic tradition. It aims to bring together our deepest understanding of democracy, with the facts of social life as we experience them." (Feinberg, 2018, pp. 120–121)

But what then does this new progressive education movement look like?

A new progressive education would recognize structural and systematic inequality and promote more equitable distribution of power. The idea of a new progressive education has three interrelated dimensions. First it has a political dimension. Students would understand the ways in which benefits are developed and distributed in American Society. Second, it has a creative dimension. Students would develop the ethical and aesthetic capacity to imagine alternative realities. Third it has an academic dimension. Students would develop the scientific, communicative and the political skills that promote agency and fulfillment. (Feinberg, 2018, p. 120)

Feinberg questions whether we should even call this movement "progressive education" or if that term too needs to be let go of in the new reconstruction. In the last sections of the chapter, he offers a few varied examples of small steps we might take in this direction. He rightfully draws on the work of Meira Levinson as a model of how to address the civic empowerment gap and the kind of training and community-based projects that might build political skills and cultivate student agency. One also might think of the

civic studies "public achievement" model as another example of the new progressive education movement Feinberg envisions. Public Achievement is an international civic education and empowerment initiative founded by Harry Boyte in which young people, faculty, community members, and parents work together on community problems and projects to "build the commonwealth" (see Boyte, 2018).

Although the examples are helpful, the reader is left with other lurking questions. Just how is this new progressive education to get off the ground, and what role does Dewey as theorist, public intellectual, and model play in that organizing effort? If we need to reconstruct Dewey's praxis in order to build this movement, and even if, à la Whitehead, it makes us historians of philosophy uncomfortable, what should we draw upon?

I end with an anecdotal note. On good authority, a word-of-mouth insight has been handed down by several generations of Deweyans to me. It has been told that John Herman Randall said that Dewey exaggerated his optimism in his published work because he felt he had a duty to the public to put a hopeful face on things. This anecdote fits well with what Dewey said about the place of the melioristic attitude in philosophy:

After all, the optimism that says that the world is already the best possible of all worlds might be regarded as the most cynical of pessimisms. If this is the best possible, what would a world which was fundamentally bad be like? Meliorism is the belief that the specific conditions which exist at one moment, be they comparatively bad or comparatively good, in any event may be bettered. It encourages intelligence to study the positive means of good and the obstructions to their realization, and to put forth endeavor for the improvement of conditions. It arouses confidence and a reasonable hopefulness as optimism does not. For the latter in declaring that good is already realized in ultimate reality tends to make us gloss over the evils that concretely exist. It becomes too readily the creed of those who live at ease, in comfort, of those who have been successful in obtaining this world's rewards. Too readily optimism makes the men who hold it callous and blind to the sufferings of the less fortunate, or ready to find the cause of troubles of others in their personal viciousness. It thus co-operates with pessimism, in spite of the extreme nominal differences between the two, in benumbing sympathetic insight and intelligent effort in reform. It beckons men away from the world of relativity and change into the calm of the absolute and eternal. (Dewey, 2008b, pp. 181–182)

Perhaps Dewey was then not so caught up in an optimistic social imaginary as Feinberg would have us believe. Rather, he wanted to lure people to the "reasonably hopeful" through his own work as a philosopher, so they could empower themselves to harness the ameliorative potential in any situation. On this view, philosophy's job is, even if it makes us suspicious sometimes, to incite us to address intelligently our most pressing problems. Feinberg's work offers just such an incitation, one Dewey himself, I think, would be pleased with as reasonably hopeful. A new educational movement that addresses our present needs might learn from Dewey that the reasonably hopeful is needed to lure us toward the better. We can be thoughtfully suspicious, but we ought to also fortify ourselves in

our philosophies with the strength to change what we can change in our present situation.

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