



## The Global Community, Religion, and Education: The Modernity of Dewey's Social Philosophy

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**Abstract.** As a starting point this paper takes Dewey's nowadays often stressed modernity and examines his social philosophy against the background of the current debates on republicanism and communitarianism. Particularly, the analysis of Dewey's *The Public and its Problem* (1927) concludes that the attention being paid to Dewey is problematic as specific religious assumptions – explicitly developed in *A Common Faith* (1934) – lie in the background of his social philosophy, and are hardly being recognized. However, as it shall be shown, without considering the religious basis, neither Dewey's social philosophy nor his educational theory can be properly understood.

One glance at recent literature reveals John Dewey's popularity. This can be shown not only in quantitative terms<sup>1</sup> but also from the judgements passed on his views, and particularly from the judgement that Dewey's social philosophy is *modern*. Robert B. Westbrook (1991) perceives in Dewey's participative definition of democracy an important background element in the “New Left” in its struggle against “corporate liberalism”, whilst Steven C. Rockefeller (also 1991) emphasises how modern Dewey's religious humanism was. Alan Ryan believes he has found important clues in Dewey's work for a better definition of the individual. Dewey is not only being praised in America for his modernity, but also in Europe.<sup>2</sup> The most prominent example of this is surely an article that appeared recently from Axel Honneth, who argues in favour of this American writer's definition of democracy – “democracy as reflective co-operation” – as opposed to a polarised debate on the normative basis of democracy, and regards it as a fertile alternative.

The ideas presented here are intended to investigate critically the validity of the assertion that Dewey is so very modern by analysing democracy as he uses the term particularly in “The Public and its Problems” ([PP] 1927). They lead to the conclusion that the attention currently being paid to Dewey is problematic as religious assumptions lie in the background of his social philosophy which not only affect his definition of democracy but greatly influenced his idea of education, and that these assumptions are receiving scant attention from the so-called “experts”.

## 1. The Common Point of Departure: Crisis Diagnosis and Criticism of Liberalism

The numerous references to Dewey have not come about by accident. They are based on a comprehensive crisis diagnosis of the Western world, or to use Taylor's expression "The Malaise of Modernity" (Taylor, 1991). This phenomenon is nothing new; on the contrary, it reappears regularly. Awareness of extensive political, social, or moral crises has throughout history led to the search and stylisation either of a new ideal situation – the best example of this is Rousseau – or of ideal persons and concepts such as the Pestalozzi renaissance after the Second World War.<sup>3</sup> Alan Ryan recognised this when he defined the prime reason for the Dewey renaissance as being the reawakening of public interest in moral and political theory with a community orientation. The starting-off point for this renaissance of interest in the community, according to him, had been the sociological studies by Bellah of the confused moral state of the average American (Bellah, 1985), contaminated as it was by a hybrid of "individualism" (Ryan, 1995, p. 23). This is the direction in which Rockefeller's motive for propagating Dewey lies: "It seems that the time is right for giving Dewey a fresh hearing. Ours is a time of moral confusion, spiritual search, and crises in the relation of civilisation and nature . . ." (Rockefeller, 1991, pp. X *et seq.*).

Dewey wrote "The Public and its Problems" on the basis of a comparable crisis diagnosis in the 1920s. His immediate reason for doing so was Walter Lippmann's "The Phantom Public", which appeared in 1925, in which Lippmann, like Dewey, had started from the assumption that democracy was dependent on a functioning public. Historical analysis brought him to the conclusion that during the course of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century *the* public had disappeared and given way to a large number of particulate publics, with the result that it was now impossible to retain the idea of democracy or rule by the people. In the same year, Dewey published a review of this book in which he basically endorsed Lippmann's criticism of the current theories of democracy (Dewey, 1925), and in the following year he held a series of lectures in Kanyon College in Ohio which resulted a year later in his book "The Public and its Problems" ([PP] 1927). His intention in this book was to reconstruct the state of the many publics and to indicate a route that would lead away from this "state of degeneration", which was affecting the whole of society. The focus of his criticism was on the one hand modern individualism and thus also liberalism, and on the other hand the lack of public transparency.

### 1.1. CRITICISM OF INDIVIDUALISM

Dewey's sociological definition for describing his day and age as a "state of degeneration" was the "Great Society". Its central characteristics are the ideology of individualism, the dominance of capitalism, the uniformity of human beings, and the loss of *the* public, all of which are connected with one another and, paradoxi-

cally enough, have their origins in the endeavours of the 17th and 18th centuries to establish democracy.

In order to understand this apparent paradox, it is necessary to understand Dewey's historical reconstruction of democracy, in which the concept of the public plays a fundamental role. In this, he uses a definition of the "public" taken from behavioural theory: as soon as an action between two people has consequences for others who were not directly involved in it, these other people obviously have an interest in the action in which they were not involved. It is this "indirect" effect that originally creates the "public character" of an action. The interest created in the people affected who were not directly involved leads to two possible reactions: a strengthening reaction if they are in favour of the consequences, or a restrictive reaction if they are opposed to them ([PP] pp. 64 *et seq.*). It was on this basis that Dewey formulated his fundamental hypothesis: "Those indirectly and seriously affected for good or for evil form a group distinctive enough to require recognition and a name. The name selected is The Public" ([PP] p. 35). This public, in Dewey's view, however, is not an amorphous mass which can articulate its views spontaneously but is an effective institution organised through representatives, the result of human reason as "a matter of adaptation of means to consequences" ([PP] p. 57). Looked at historically, the public forms a reasonable means for exerting influence on non-democratic governments.

Dewey's historical reconstruction of the origins of the public is accompanied by the question as to how rulers have been selected at each stage. Originally, he explained, the selection of the rulers and their powers and authority was never the outcome of any selection procedure based on abstract ideas but was more a matter of chance. Holders of office were generally speaking never selected on the basis of their specific suitability but on the basis of privileges. The examples Dewey cited were the gerontocracies, in which people ruled who had been entrusted with government business solely on the basis of their age and experience: "Those who were already conspicuous in some respect, were it only for long grey beards, had political powers conferred upon them" ([PP] p. 78); or in other cases, governments were formed from soldiers because people believed that "the ability of a man to win battles has seemed to mark him out as a predestined manager of the civil affairs of a community" ([PP] p. 79).<sup>4</sup> One feature common to all these types of government, he pointed out, was that they turned into dynasties: "*Beati possidentes*. The family from which a ruler has been taken occupies in virtue of that fact a conspicuous position and superior power" ([PP] p. 80). This dynastic element, in turn, brought about a favouritism economy and led to a situation in which positions of power were misused for private purposes. "The centralisation and scope of functions which are needed in order to serve the interests of the public become, in other words, seductions to draw state officials to subserving private ends" ([PP] p. 81).

At this point in historical development, a movement now set in which ultimately led to democracy. Out of fear that the rulers were misusing power in a manner that was illegitimate in terms of the public interest, the need was awakened to

limit the scope of their power. At this point, Dewey's argumentation becomes particularly important: he states that this movement did *not* arise from "theories of the individual and his rights", but that it was the inevitable outcome of "a vast series of adaptations and responsive accommodations" ([PP] p. 84 *et seq.*) which could not even happen until the public had come to realise that it was a public. "Political democracy has emerged as a kind of net consequence of a vast multitude of responsive adjustments to a vast number of situations, no two of which were alike, but which tended to converge to a common outcome" ([PP] p. 84).

Following this route, Dewey defined the state as an institution which is constituted by the public and organised by officials with their specific power and authority. "A public articulated and operating through representative officers is the state; there is no state without a government, but also there is none without the public" ([PP] p. 67). The idea of the state as something in its own right or that it could be the revelation of a general will or general reason is illusory ([PP] p. 68). The state is the product of the development of human association and can take on various different forms, all according to the natural or material circumstances surrounding it, for which reason there can never be any theory of "The" state ([PP] p. 8), nor can it ever have any single correct form ([PP] pp. 32 *et seq.*). Accordingly, the theoretician's problem is not the "discovery of the state" but "the practical problem of people living together". The development into a state primarily results from working on Nature, developing the appropriate aids, and creating an exchange of views between individual communities. Other professions and occupations arise, all according to the natural basis of the original community, and further developments arise from them in turn. "Roughly speaking, tools and implements determine occupations, and occupations determine the consequences of associated activity. In determining consequences, they institute publics with different interests, which exact different types of political behavior to care for them" ([PP] pp. 44 *et seq.*).

Dewey's theory of freedom as an evolutionary reaction to suppression is the key to understanding his criticism of individualism and thus also liberalism. As he was well aware, it contradicted the general and widely recognised theory that freedom is a purpose in itself and is based on a natural state of mankind. According to Dewey, however, this thesis is not only wrong but has also had fatal consequences in history. The mistake lies in the basic assumption that human beings can be regarded as having been presocial from the start, and this has been fatal because this mistake was made at exactly the point in time when the *practical* movement for limiting illegitimate government power needed theoretical arguments: in the *practical* battle against political rulers, meaning in the public's constitutional process, people tried *theoretically*, by means of a "return to the naked individual", to dissolve *all* associative bonds or at least only to permit those that the individual was willing to accept of his own free will and ensured that he could attain his own private objectives ([PP] p. 88). This "ideology of individualism" ultimately led to a situation in which the purpose of political domination was limited simply and solely to protecting those individual's rights to which he is allegedly entitled by Nature, and this created the

basis for the ideology of liberalism and the theory of the so-called “night-watchman state”.<sup>5</sup> This ideology found its clearest expression in the French Revolution, which abolished all associations and – theoretically at least – brought the plain individual face to face with the state. According to Dewey, this commonly accepted approach to an explanation is wrong. The occurrence of the Revolution as such cannot be explained in this view, because it does not envisage any appropriate consideration of economic and scientific development or applied technology. The true causes in fact lay in the industrialisation of economic life in the 18th century, which created both new and powerful social conditions and also individual personal opportunities and needs which had been very largely suppressed by French economic policy. As a result, fear of the government and a desire to limit its claims to power had been enormously reinforced, and it was this that had ultimately led to violent rebellion ([PP] pp. 89 *et seq.*).

It is at this point that it first becomes necessary to review the idea that Dewey is modern, because there is no escaping the point that his crisis diagnosis is very largely in line with the theoretical arguments used today by communitarists, and it is this that makes these people’s references to him so illuminating. A book which appeared in 1982, Michael J. Sandel’s “Liberalism and the Limits of Justice”, pointed the way ahead for these *theoretical* arguments between communitarianism and political liberalism. The main subject-matter of this book is John Rawls’ “Theory of Justice” (1971), a work that Sandel regards as representing the central new foundation for political liberalism. Basically, Sandel’s aim is to show that Rawls’ approach contains fundamental contradictions which demolish the whole theoretical building (Sandel, 1982, p. 46). The focal point of this criticism is Rawls’ hypothetical construction of the “original situation”. The main features of this is that human beings search for the basic principles of justice that enable them to live together, so that each individual can pursue his own aims in life. The mental experiment thus provides for the participating persons to be placed behind a “veil of ignorance”, meaning they are aware neither of their own social position nor of their private aims in life. Rawls now assumes that this is a “fair” situation and that accordingly the principles of justice on which the participants agree will also be basically fair: “justice as fairness”. With this in mind, Rawls now looks for principles of justice that take precedence over all attributes and tries to establish them on a legal basis; Rawls thus places justice ahead of the good.

The point here is neither to substantiate each of Sandel’s arguments individually nor to examine the stringency of his argumentation. The interesting aspect here is one of the central points of criticism that can be raised particularly against two related assumptions that Rawls applies: firstly, that justice is the primary social virtue (“primacy of justice”), and secondly that right takes precedence over the good (“priority of right”). The basis of his argumentation strategy, concentrating though on contradictions, is the reconstruction of Rawls’ more implicit than explicit philosophical anthropology as the basis of the experiment in the “original situation” (see p. 60); by assuming, even if only hypothetically, that there is an

“original situation”, he implies a definition of the human being as possessing an identity which is *independent* of and *precedes* his objectives and attributes. “The antecedent unity of the self means that the subject, however heavily conditioned by his surroundings, is always, irreducibly, prior to his values and ends, and never fully constituted by them” (p. 22). The aims and attributes which characterize a human being, this argument goes, are thus not constitutive elements of the self but are possessed by the self. “To assert the priority of the self whose sovereign agency is assured, it was necessary to identify an ‘essentially unencumbered’ self, conceived as a pure subject of possession, distinct from its contingent aims and attributes, standing always behind them” (p. 121). On the one hand, Sandel now proves that any such self must be aware of itself in order to be able to discover what separates it from the contingent attributes and objectives (pp. 55 *et seq.*), but that this is not possible because this assumption turned it into an individual before it existed and therefore has no reflection facility at all – quite unlike human beings, who form their identity through reflection of the empirical course through life (see pp. 152 *et seq.*). However, if on the other hand it is not clear *who* is acting in the first place, and if moreover no reasons exist to show why human beings keep to these rules on their empirical course through life, Rawls’ approach becomes obsolete, unless he contradicts his own basic assumption and admits that jointly held values exist *a priori* which endow the human being firstly with identity and secondly with guarantees (pp. 150 and 156). Then, however, justice can no longer be regarded as the primary social virtue (“primacy of justice”), and right cannot be placed ahead of the good (“priority of right”). Consequently, the book ends, after explanations of further arguments,<sup>6</sup> with the conclusion that a deontologist concept such as Rawls attempted to derive from Kant must fail on account of the very premises on which it is built (pp. 175 *et seq.*; see also Sandel, 1984, pp. 82 *et seq.*).<sup>7</sup>

Communitarist criticism not only restricts itself to the theoretical premises of liberalism but also turns to the specific moral situation of the Americans which has been indicated to be the fatal consequence of their theoretical prescriptions. This attribution of the problems of social practice to theoretical prescriptions, however, itself creates problems, as both Taylor (1989) and Walzer (1990) have noted. Nevertheless, it appears to be popular within communitarianism and can also be found in Dewey’s work, at least to the extent that it is unclear whether and to what extent he attributes individualism as a specific life-form to the false ideology of individualism. In any case, Dewey very much takes the fact into account that, in connection with the establishment of democracies such as American society, the foundations of their own destruction are already laid, as is expressed later in a uniform mass society dominated by capitalism. Individualism and the uniformity of the masses appear to him to be the two negative sides of one and the same coin: degeneration.

Dewey’s argumentation, which regards degeneration as evolutionary and does not make any explicit reference to the ideology of individualism, runs as follows: the success for the established political, social, and economic structures in the

young America laid down “channels” through which “non-political, industrialised currents” ([PP] p. 114) flowed which to a very large extent changed communal social life. Dewey regards these “channels” as including railways, the media, transport, and trade. These achievements, in his view, may have initially made it possible for the state to spread itself out over an enormous area, because it provided the facilities for creating “sufficient similarities in the ideas and feelings” of the multi-cultural immigrants, so that the state was retained and old assumptions were punished as lies which had asserted that a democratic state should only be smaller and ethnic, but this development, however admirable it may have been, did also have the disadvantage of making communal human life uniform and mechanised, and it was this that ultimately led to the loss of *the* public. According to Dewey, the process of national integration could never have been the result of any deliberate action. “Mechanical forces have operated, and it is no cause for surprise if the effect is more mechanical than vital” ([PP] p. 115). A political unity thus created had its price, namely that of “social and intellectual uniformity”. This uniformity is not to be regarded as the same as the “shared goals” of a society, but is the expression of this process of reducing everything to a mass. “Mass production is not confined to the factory” ([PP] p. 116), but permeates the entirety of social life, which is increasingly determined by economic considerations and regards its highest aim as being “prosperity” (p. 118).

The inability of the public to regard itself as such is due primarily to the developing economy, which has taken on forms that hardly anyone can understand any more and has started to manipulate human beings through “salaried opinion-formers” for its own purposes. These had grown accustomed, emotionally and intellectually, to the conditions of mass-society, but were afraid of them in matters of their direct concern. These anxieties are rationalised out of existence, which leads to the sanctified dogmas of established institutions such as the Constitution, the Supreme Court of Justice, and private property. This dogmatic state of “social awareness” results on the one hand from the division of science into independent disciplines, screened off from one another, such as anthropology, history, sociology, ethics, economics, and political science, all of which more or less relate only to themselves. This phenomenon includes on the other hand the artificial separation of “science” from the “arts”, as a reflection of the unreal dichotomy between “applied” and “pure” science, and, as Dewey goes on to argue, this divorce is connotated with values to such an extent that every kind of knowledge designated as “pure” is contemplated with awe, whereas “applied” knowledge easily attracts contempt. Both, he claims, have fatal consequences. On the one hand, the developing applied sciences can now only be understood by specialists, and on the other hand the further regulation of human affairs is continuing in an “unplanned, prejudiced, and unfair” manner because the alternatives to (applied) science are “ignorance, prejudice, class-interest, and accident” ([PP] p. 174). The senseless attempt to solve human problems by applied science has led to a situation in which the “physical sciences” now dominate human affairs, and do so in the interests

not of social justice or democracy but of “an owning, profit-hungry class”. Shared knowledge, which is not only incomplete but also artificial, “has played its part in generating enslavement of men, women, and children in factories in which they are animated machines to tend inanimate machines” ([PP] p. 175).

Such communitarian criticism which relates less to the theoretical premises of present-day individualism than to the social condition of desolidarisation, the collapse of values, and the crisis of identity and of sense in the modern Western world considered in its totality, can relate to Dewey, as does the theoretical criticism of communitarianism. This can be made particularly clear by taking as an example the perhaps best-known of all those present-day critics whose orientation is mainly practical, the sociologist Robert N. Bellah, who with his team in 1985 published a (first) best-seller under the title of “Habits of the Heart”. This starts off from a description of America in the early 19th century, as produced by de Tocqueville, and follows the degeneration of the communal and community-supported network of voluntary social obligations in the Church, the neighbourhood, and the suburb so highly praised by this French writer. One of his main points of criticism is the dominance of economic thinking in politics, the origin of which lies in the late 19th century. “This Neocapitalist vision of national life has its origins in the economic and social transformation of the late 19th century. It derives from the creed of business, particularly corporate business, which was able in that era to emancipate itself from the strictures of local communities and explicitly to celebrate the flourishing of business as the principal means towards a better future” (1985/1996, p. 263). It was thus possible to regard it as an all-embracing programme of reform, as Bellah says in his 1991 book “The Good Society”, which developed precisely in the 1980s into a new version of the “tyranny of the market”: “Belief in the free market was revived; the premise of the game of Monopoly was offered with messianic expectations such as have seldom been heard since the nineteenth century” (1991, p. 90). Bellah considers this to have been so significant because this semi-religious view of the economy occurred at a time when progress in the democratic welfare state was no longer perceptible and the force of religious and republican language, which had diluted the ideology of individualism, had grown weaker. “In a situation where further advances in democratic affluence seemed unexpectedly problematic, the market metaphor took on singular power. Disillusionment with the welfare state, combined with the weakening of the languages of biblical religion and civic republicanism that traditionally moderated Locke’s individualism, led many to take the market maximizer as the paradigm of the human person” (1991, pp. 90 *et seq.*).<sup>8</sup>

## 1.2. THE DISAPPEARANCE OF THE TRANSPARENT PUBLIC IN MODERN MASS-SOCIETY

Even though cardinal points of criticism in communitarianism tally closely with Dewey’s analysis, one element is still missing which plays a crucial role in his work and also creates problems with references to him, namely the public, or to



be more precise the “eclipse of the public”. Dewey argues that the ideology of the individual, equipped as it is with natural rights, and the trend to uniformity in human beings had favoured the new industrial regime, which owed its stability to the “new social bonds” which were “as rigid as those which were disappearing and much more extensive” ([PP] p. 102). These “powerful, faceless business groups and organisations” largely determined “the thoughts, desires, and actions of all”, and had thus ushered in a “new age of human relationships”: *impersonal* networks of relationships which made it impossible for citizens to identify themselves as a public ([PP] p. 126). This trend had revealed itself as two-headed: “The same forces which have brought about the forms of democratic government . . . have also brought about conditions which halt the social and humane ideals that demand the utilization of government as the genuine instrumentality of an inclusive and fraternally associated public” ([PP] p. 109). Whilst industry had developed, the development of the corresponding political organs had lagged behind. “The new age of human relationships’ has no political agencies worthy of it. The democratic public is still largely inchoate and unorganized” ([PP] p. 109).

Dewey’s crisis diagnosis is very much in line with Lippmann’s view that *the* public no longer existed and that it was no longer possible to discern, in this mass-society, where this (discursive) public was that people in official positions were supposed to be representing. As an expression of this disappearing public, Dewey pointed to the rapidly declining number of voters actually going to the polls, a consequence of growing apathy in the voting population. This was based on the assumption that politicians no longer governed, but that “Big Business” did. Regardless of whether or not this assumption was correct, it was certainly true that the parties were scarcely capable of producing effective government programmes because they were primarily designed to adapt themselves to social currents ([PP] pp. 119 *et seq.*). This degeneration seemed to be taking on the structure of a *circulum vitiosus* because the lack of understanding on the part of the public was creating a “vacuum” between itself and the government which was being filled by “the bosses with their political machines” ([PP] p. 120). The domination of big business, with its complex social consequences, was in this view not the cause of the eclipse of the public (because this could not understand the structures that had now emerged), but was profiting from the gap that had thus opened up between the public, which no longer was one, and the government, which consisted of representatives of a public that was no longer in office. This makes the situation all the more complicated and hard to understand, so that politics in the proper meaning of the word was no longer happening. “Political parties may rule, but they do not govern. The public is so confused and eclipsed that it cannot even use the organs through which it is supposed to mediate political action and polity” ([PP] p. 121). With regard to the institution of the electoral college, the situation today is such that the great mass of voters do not even know the names of its members, and the college is thus nothing more than an “impersonal registration machine” ([PP] p. 111). The elected government representatives, moreover, had

hardly any personal responsibility any more towards the voters at large, because they represented an amorphous group, quite apart from the fact that the politicians were elected completely at random because of the “apathy” of the public ([PP] p. 122).

The analysis of the eclipse of the public, however, led Dewey to different conclusions from those of Lippmann. The match with the diagnosis of the crisis leads him to ask about the essential nature of the public and its position in historic processes. The two fundamental questions that Dewey asks are: “Is the public a myth? Or does it come into being only in periods of marked social transition, when crucial alternative issues stand out, such as that between throwing one’s lot in with the conservation of established institutions or with forwarding new tendencies” (p. 123). Dewey answers both questions in the negative; for him, the American communities in the 18th century were *the* specific historical paradigm of an existing and functioning public and democracy (see 2) from which he develops those elements that should lead to the restoration of public and democracy (see 3). Basically, Dewey sticks to his conviction that, *from first principles*, a government is there “to serve its community”, and that this aim can only be met if the community itself can choose who is to govern it and what policies they are to pursue. In addition to this, he takes the view that such insights, once people have become aware of them, will turn into “mature deposits” which will withstand all later crises. This conviction is in itself “not a mystic faith” but “a well-attested conclusion from historic facts”, for which reason “the cure for the ailments of democracy is more democracy” ([PP], p. 146).

## 2. American Communities as *Historical Paradigm*

There is a mental grouping which just on its own will show that, according to Dewey, the public, and thus also democracy, is not a myth. The actual *historic* problem of the “Great Society” is, after all, according to Dewey, that it has invaded and partially disintegrated the small communities of former times ([PP] p. 127) without being able to solve the problems it caused. Dewey’s view of these former “small communities” took its specific form from the American communities of the 18th century, which represent a kind of Golden Age in historical development.

One prerequisite for a public and democratic state is a relatively complex association of people based on a specialist division of labour. The earliest communities, which mainly had to assert themselves against the vicissitudes of Nature, were never able to be states, nor democracies. “Immediate contiguity, face to face relationships, have consequences which generate a community of interests, a sharing of values, too direct and vital to occasion a need for political organization” ([PP] p. 39). “With such a condition of intimacy, the state is an impertinence” (p. 41).

Dewey compares these early communities at the end of a long process of development with “genuine” ones which are represented by the public and therefore meet the requirement for establishing themselves as a democratic state, and

considers that the establishment of the United States by the colonies striving for independence was the first high-point in the development of a public and of democracy, and that the democratic American Constitution is the most visible sign that political democracy was asserting itself. It was “developed out of a genuinely community life”, a community which he also sees in “association in local and small centres”, dominated in the conditions under which the pioneers lived by agricultural and craft trades. The specific conditions of the settlers had favoured hard work, skill, ingenuity, adaptability, and neighbour-like friendliness. “The township or some not much larger area was the political unit, the town meeting the political medium, and roads, schools, the peace of the community, were the political objectives” ([PP] p. 111). The state, in his view, was basically nothing more than the “sum of such units”, and the “national state” was a federation of smaller states. “The imagination of the founders did not travel far beyond what could be accomplished and understood in a congeries of self-governing communities” ([PP] p. 111).

The description of the state of affairs during the period of the establishment of the American nation seems at first sight to fit in with the arguments of present-day communitarians, and to endow their references to Dewey with additional legitimacy. However, quite apart from the fact that for Dewey a communal *public* is the foundation of democracy – an element that is not all that easy to find with the communitarians – it is also possible to find theory elements of republicanism in Dewey’s description, which should not be hastily muddled up with communitarianism, even though both stand in opposition to liberalism.<sup>9</sup> These elements are now to be examined more closely, even if at present no representative of republicanism has (so far) based his arguments explicitly on those of Dewey.<sup>10</sup>

Dewey’s description of the creation of democracy, which he defines in its oppositional character as “liberation from oppression and tradition” ([PP] p. 86), already finds its equivalent in present-day republicanism research.<sup>11</sup> Also, without naming the central term by its name, he describes a state of affairs, dominated by cronyism and the kleptocracy of dynastic forms of government, which in republicanism is called “corruption”.<sup>12</sup> This accusation of corruption is closely linked with Dewey’s rejection of luxury, which is shown in “Democracy and Education” to be a consequence of despotism, the criticism of which belongs to the repertoire of republican rhetoric. Because despotism, in Dewey’s view, and its anti-egalitarian structure hinders the free and mutual interchange between human beings on the basis of an equal partnership, leads to privation in the lower classes, whilst its consequence in the upper classes is moral decay: “Their culture tends to be sterile, to be turned back to feed on itself; their art becomes a showy display and artificial; their wealth luxurious, their knowledge over-specialised, and their manners fastidious rather than humane” ([DE] p. 84 – see also pp. 119 and 313 *et seq.*). This stand-point is very much in line with that of Rousseau. In his public reply to a treatise by Charles Bordes, who in 1751 had rejected Rousseau’s *Thèse des premiers discours* and had emphasised the positive importance of luxury, wrote to

the great man of Geneva: “Luxury can be necessary in order to provide the poor with bread; but, if there were no luxury, there would not be any poor people. It occupies idle citizens” (Rousseau, 1752/1964, p. 79).

The example of the electoral college in the political system of the American communities will perhaps best serve to show the extent to which Dewey’s analysis of the democratic freedom movement conforms with the republicanism of the 18th century. The appointment of an electoral college to decide on the holders of office, in Dewey’s view, in fact required the citizens to know the candidates personally and to elect those who were known for “uprightness”, “public spirit”, and “knowledge”; the virtue of the members of the electoral college was to be the guarantee for policies that were really devoted to the affairs and interests of the public. This theoretical model corresponds to a large extent to Rousseau’s republican ideal in his “Social Contract” (1762), according to which a nation is fit – among other things – for just laws if it is not too large. “What nation is fit for legislation? (...) The one in which each member can be known to all the others” (2nd Book, 10th Chapter; *ŒC* II, p. 390). Rousseau specifies precisely, in the chapter on democracy, that this form of state is only possible if all the people in it can meet within a short time and can know one another,<sup>13</sup> and if virtue – a point derived from Montesquieu’s definition of a republic in “The Spirit of Laws” (1748) – stands at the centre: “That is why a famous author has given virtue as the principle to the republic; because none of these conditions could exist without virtue” (3rd Book, 4th Chapter, *ŒC* III, p. 405).<sup>14</sup>

Looked at historically, the coincidence between republicanism and Dewey’s reconstruction of the origins of democracy in America is no accident, and is confirmed by the latest literature. John Pocock, in “The Machiavellian Moment” (1975), has demonstrated that the period in which the United States were being founded were dominated far less than had previously been thought by liberal than by republican motives. “The American Revolution, which to an older school of historians seemed a rationalist or naturalist breach with an old world and its history, now appears to have been involved in a complex relation both with English and Renaissance cultural history and with a tradition of thought which had from its beginnings confronted political man with his own history and was, by the time of the Revolution, being used to express an early form of the quarrel with modernity”, p. 506). Pocock shows that, in the middle of the 18th century in America, English republicanism was particularly virulent. The prime movers behind English republicanism since the end of the 18th century had been on the one hand the Dissenters, many of whom emigrated to America, and in particular to New England, where Dewey grew up, and on the other hand republicanism was promoted by radical Whigs who pursued the ideal of the “landed man” – the wealthy land-owner – in dealing with the commercial trends of the Court Whigs, meaning a person who in the republican manner is not corrupted by any capitalistic greed and, because of his secure income, can devote himself totally to the general well-being. This is an ideal that was to be found more often in Virginia and the other southern

Colonies than in the north. “The Whig canon and the neo-Harringtonians, Milton, Harrington and Sidney, Trenchard, Gordon and Bolingbroke, together with the Greek, Roman, and Renaissance masters of the tradition as far as Montesquieu, formed the authoritative literature of this culture; and its values and concepts were those with which we have grown familiar – a civic and patriot ideal in which the personality was founded in property, perfected in citizenship but perpetually threatened by corruption” (p. 507).

### 3. The Restoration of Democracy Through the “Great Community”

Dewey showed, in his analysis of the American communities, that “the public” is not a myth. The second question he had to answer was whether it is merely a historical phenomenon or one that only makes its appearance in times of crisis. Basically, he looked round for possible ways in which the ideal that he saw in the American communities could be created under the conditions of a modern market economy, the consequences of which he regarded as degeneration. The terminological course of this programme is prescribed in advance: Dewey was looking for possible ways of turning the “Great Society” into a “Great Community”, and here the great intellectual problem was to find the *means* by which this mobile and manifold public could recognise itself again, as it could thus and only thus become a true public. This “search for conditions under which the Great Society could become the Great Community” (p. 147) was Dewey’s prospective goal, and this may have revealed him to be evolutionistic, but not deterministic. The “technological age” is a phase people must go through in order that they may be ultimately able to be “absorbed into a humane age” on the basis of material security (p. 217). The analysis of the means that Dewey refers to in “The Public and its Problems” shows that both republican and communitarian matters do still exist but have now been joined by universal dimensions which call them into question. The resultant contradiction is not resolved until we come to Dewey’s definition of religion (see 4).

#### 3.1. COMMUNICATIONS

The third phase in the reconstruction of democracy is mainly normative in character, i.e. it is a *desideratum* (see [PP] p. 143). It is fitting that Dewey refers increasingly to an “idea” of democracy that is to be analysed here – “Regarded as an idea, democracy is not an alternative to other principles of associated life. It is the idea of community life itself (. . .). Only when we start from a community as a fact, grasp the fact in thought so as to clarify and enhance its constituent elements, can we reach an idea of democracy which is not utopian” – and which is capable of making sense of the three central slogans of the French Revolution (which were so distorted at the time by the ideology of individualism): “Fraternity, liberty, and equality isolated from communal life are hopeless abstractions” ([PP] pp. 148 *et seq.*).

The central characteristic of the community is communications, through which it creates a public. Community and public can be said to exist when, firstly, people act in concert, secondly, all involved are aware of the consequences of these actions and accept them as being good, and thirdly, this “good” stimulates all involved to exert great effort to retain this “good” because it is shared by all of them. “The clear consciousness of a communal life, in all its implications, constitutes the idea of democracy” ([PP] p. 149). Dewey emphasises that on the other hand mere associative action still does not signify a community, because this requires the concepts of “we” and “our”. “Wherever there is conjoint activity whose consequences are appreciated as good by all singular persons who take part in it, and where the realization of the good is such as to effect an energetic desire and effort to sustain it in being just because it is a good shared by all, there is in so far a community” (p. 149, and see p. 152). Public, community, and democracy all necessarily require communications, the exchange of signs and symbols as the means of looking upon joint activities from without.

### 3.2. KNOWLEDGE

“The ultimate harm is that the understanding by man of his own affairs and his ability to direct them are sapped at their root when knowledge of nature is disconnected from its human function” ([PP] p. 176). Dewey therefore pleads for continuous social research to provide the public with information about the present-day conditions of associated life. Public opinion can only be created when people are informed about facts: “. . . genuinely public policy cannot be generated unless it be informed by knowledge, and this knowledge does not exist except when there is systematic, thorough, and well-equipped search and record” ([PP] pp. 178 *et seq.*).

The production of knowledge that makes sense to the community overcomes the division between “pure” and “applied”, because this is ultimately the expression of a non-democratic social structure. The rejection of “applied” sciences originated with the Greeks of antiquity, where the definition of knowledge was itself an expression of social reality, an image of the master-and-slave society in which only the latter worked whilst the former sought human value in contemplation ([DE] pp. 228 *et seq.*). This “humanism”, according to Dewey, continued right up until modern times, and even up to a time in which technology was being dynamised by science and thus making democracy possible. It would thus appear necessary to assume “that natural science is more humanistic than an alleged humanism which bases its educational schemes upon the specialized interests of a leisure class” ([DE] p. 229).

The creation of knowledge is only the one problem, and the dissemination of knowledge is the other. Dewey opposes the often expressed view that people in general had no interest in the results of social research and could for that reason never form a public nor establish a democracy. Although he recognised the problem, he accuses sceptics of not taking the power of art into account ([PP]

p. 183). He admitted that it was correct to state that scientific journals in which the results of the research were presented could hardly have any widespread effect, but the substance of these research studies was of “such great and broad human significance” that it would be very attractive to artists to spread this knowledge amongst the populace at large. “This process is art. Poetry, the drama, the novel, are proofs that the problem of presentation is not insoluble. Artists have always been the real purveyors of news, for it is not the outward happening in itself which is new but the kindling by it of emotion, perception, and appreciation” ([PP] p. 184).

### 3.3. PLURALITY AND HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT

The problem, in Dewey’s view, is not that the public no longer exists but that too many of them exist. “There is too much public, a public too diffused and scattered and too intricate in composition” ([PP] p. 137); the public has thus become “amorphous and unarticulated” ([PP] p. 131). Whilst he places a negative value on plurality of publics, and tries to overcome it with knowledge, art, and communications, he on the other hand places positive value on the cultural plurality. This can be shown by an example that, quite deliberately, addresses a subject relevant to educational science: Dewey said that a member of a gang of robbers would only be promoted in those “potentialities” that were useful to the gang, whilst his other abilities would necessarily lie fallow. A “good citizen”, on the other hand, would be a member of a number of groups, such as his family, the general economy, and scientific or artistic associations. As in the gang of robbers, these groupings promote the potentialities in each of the people belonging to them that are important *to that particular group*, but, by participating in a number of different groupings and exchanging knowledge and ideas with them, citizens can develop “holistically”: “fullness of integrated personality is therefore possible of achievement, since the pulls and responses of different groups reinforce one another and their values accord” ([PP] p. 148).

Dewey emphasises that an individual can never be *set up in opposition* to an association of which he or she is an integral part. One person might be an individual in a church community, another in his or her place of work, and the differences are perfectly easy to accept that arise from the fact that the one has nothing to do with the other. However, they could set off an inner conflict, and that would in turn lead to “the” abstract individual being totally separated from “the” abstract society and thus to a “residual individual” being designed who only belonged to himself. “From this premise, and from this only, there develops the unreal question of how individuals come to be united in societies and groups: *the* individual and *the* social group are now opposed to each other, and there is the problem of ‘reconciling’ them” ([PP] p. 191). Dewey is concerned with the specific individual and the specific society: “To learn to be human is to develop through the give-and-take of communication an effective sense of being an individually distinctive member of a community” ([PP] p. 154). The emphasis lies here both on “member of a

community” and on “individual”. The “nature of the democratic idea in its general social sense” consists of two dimensions: looking from the point of view of the individual this idea means, on the one hand, making the largest possible contribution to the formation and management of those groups to which one belongs, and on the other hand participating in their values whenever necessary. This also means, from the groups’ side, on the one hand “liberating” the individual abilities of the members and on the other hand bringing them into concordance with the “communal interests and goods”.

It is in this *double* aspect of harmoniously shaped individuals and communities that the moral value of democracy can be found, as Dewey had emphasised in “Education and Democracy”. “When (...) democracy has a moral and ideal meaning, it is that a social<sup>15</sup> return to be demanded from all and that opportunity for development of distinctive capacities be afforded all. The separation of the two aims in education is fatal to democracy” ([DE] p. 122).

#### 3.4. STRENGTHENING THE FACE-TO-FACE SOCIETY

The Great Community distinguishes itself from the Great Society by the free and mutual communications between informed people, who thus form a public and regulate the relationships between local associations and enrich their experience. The Great Community, however, does not possess the qualities of the local communities, which can communicate face-to-face and thus generate a genuine pedagogic atmosphere, thus becoming the *sine qua non* of the humanisation that this process is striving to achieve. This inherent quality results in family and neighbourhood always having remained “the chief agencies of nurture” ([PP] p. 211) because they represent the genuine means through which attitudes are formed and ideas acquired, and these in turn set their roots in the character of a person. For this reason, Dewey pleads for the “restoration” of the communities destroyed by the Great Society, because he considers that there is no alternative to the vitality and depth of close and direct communications: firstly, the direct experience of a bond of neighbourly association is able to generate love and understanding for human beings: “Democracy must begin at home, and its home is the neighbourly community” ([PP] p. 213). “Community” and “communal activities” would thus become “words to conjure with”; the “local is the ultimate universal” ([PP] p. 215), and Dewey believed that the future of democracy in any case depends on the restoration of the small communities. “Unless local communal life can be restored, the public cannot adequately resolve its most urgent problem: to find and identify itself” ([PP] p. 216). All the same, Dewey defines “restoration” not so much in the nostalgic sense of recreating something that has passed away, because with the globalisation of research and the artistic communication of this knowledge to the global public on the one hand, and the plurality of communities on the other, people now have vastly greater opportunities than anyone had ever had in the 18th century. “But if it [the local communal life, DT] be reestablished, it will manifest a fullness,



variety and freedom of possession and enjoyment of meanings and goods” of which even the local communities of the past remained in ignorance. “While local, it will not be isolated” ([PP] p. 216). Dewey regards the reason for this as being in the enrichment of the local community through its communicative participation in the (world-wide) Great Community. This means that the communicative exchange of ideas and knowledge does not stop when it comes to a national frontier; territorial states should not be allowed to be barriers causing an impoverishment of experience and of this exchange. The world-wide communications established by the Great Community overcome political frontiers to the outside world which would create “jealousy, fear, suspicion, and hostility” on the inside ([PP] p. 217).

#### 4. The Religious and Pedagogic Basis

On the basis of these facts, Axel Honneth, in the essay mentioned above, comes to the conclusion that Dewey’s theory of democracy is superior to two other models of democracy currently under discussion and are being fielded against liberalism (and its negative consequences). Both these models, over which Dewey is being given preference, are designated by Honneth – somewhat confusingly, but on account of his having derived them from Habermas – as “proceduralism” and “republicanism” (1999, p. 37),<sup>16</sup> both of which aim in their different ways at more democratic participation than “actually happens in political liberalism” (p. 38). Both models are said to derive from Dewey, which might be understandable but is inappropriate, because they each only share one side of Dewey’s approach, whilst Honneth himself tries to bring these two sides together (pp. 40 *et seq.*): the reflective process and democratic deliberation on the one hand, political community and communal goals on the other (p. 41). The main reason for which Dewey can be distinguished from the two other models (and which guides Honneth’s argumentation) is that he does not take his line from the model of “communicative consultation, but from the model of social co-operation” (p. 41).

Honneth emphasises that Dewey’s real strength, compared with the other two models – and for different reasons in each case – lies in the fact that he had recognised the fundamental significance of specific experience of life in the “sub-political association of all citizens” (pp. 58 *et seq.*). Compared with republicanism, in his view, the theoretical support gained from these sub-political areas was superior because they enable the realisation to dawn that the human being is not only a political animal and that political virtue is not the be-all and end-all. Compared with proceduralism, the advantage of taking these fundamental experiences into account in the communities lies in the fact that it enables human co-operation to be learnt, and at the same time enables the unresolved question of proceduralism, namely the question of the citizens’ motives and interests, to be resolved at last.

Honneth himself falls short of his objective with this interpretation. When he tries “to understand democratic morals ... as the outcome of the experience that

all members of society could gain with one another if they were only drawn co-operatively to one another by a just system of the division of labour” (p. 65, see also p. 59), he reduces Dewey to a theory of ethical capitalism. And when he attributes “individual freedom” to experience gained “in mutual co-operation”, he limits the human being to a rational entity. Both reductions miss both the point and the complex of problems in “The Public and its Problems”, namely that this “brotherly” experience in the community involves exactly the experience that goes beyond the bounds of the rational and thus gives rise to a deeper educational effect: “The connections of the ear with vital and out-going thought and emotion are immensely closer and more varied than those of the eye. Vision is a spectator; hearing is a participator” ([PP] pp. 218 *et seq.*).

Dewey’s solution (of which Honneth to some extent attempts to take over the defensible part), according to which people are to be led to global communications through their day-to-day experience in the face-to-face communities that need strengthening politically, begs the inescapable question as to *why* they should do so, which is to a certain extent the motivational level. Honneth’s reply, that people learn this in the “sub-political areas”, is tautological because it does not explain what could induce people to break out of the communities that create their identities for them and gain knowledge which could wherever possible question their identities – and who then nevertheless act in a manner orientated to the communal well-being. A similar problem arises at the level of the “sub-political areas” themselves; Honneth cannot explain why these communities should not be tempted to gain a privileged position over other communities within the state. Thirdly, Honneth does not understand what Dewey is talking about when he refers to the sociological knowledge that is fundamental to democracy. Dewey is not only concerned with “more ... knowledge” (Honneth, 1999, p. 54) but with “a kind of knowledge and insight which does not yet exist” ([PP] p. 166). It can be said to Honneth’s credit that Dewey did not actually solve these problems<sup>17</sup> in “The Public and its Problems”; however, the reduction of the problems to rationality points in exactly the opposite direction to the one that Dewey took seven years later, in 1934, when his work “A Common Faith” appeared which can be regarded as the solution to these problems.

#### 4.1. THE RELIGIOUS BASIS

The theoretical problems that result in “The Public and its Problems” can be roughly summarised as one core problem: the relationship between the particular and the universal. Dewey’s axiom, that the local is ultimately the universal, does not help to solve the problem, but merely makes it plainer. He needs to be able to explain how individual harmony relates to the universality of the local and, in turn, with the global dimension of communications, but without having to make recourse to any metaphysics, which he rejects just as forcefully as natural law.<sup>18</sup>

“A Common Faith” is made up of three parts. The first part, “Religion versus the Religious”, aims at the emancipation of the latter in order to escape from the supranaturalism of the religions and thus to identify the religious element in normal experience. The second part, “Faith and its Object”, shows that in this religious element of experience there is always some belief in an ideal, and emphasises that the (practical) power of this belief becomes greater when one distances oneself completely from supranaturalism. The third part assumes a “mysterious totality of all present and future human beings”, which is called the “Universe”, and places value on the fact that the intellect is not capable on its own of understanding this “encompassing scope of existence” ([CF] p. 56).

This third part contains a similar historic reconstruction to that in “The Public and its Problems”, although the focus is now not on the public as a necessary prerequisite for democracy but on religion, although this is likewise ultimately a necessary prerequisite for democracy. The starting-off point is antiquity, in which religion and politics formed *one* sphere of public life into which every member of the community was born and in which and to which each one was brought up ([CF] pp. 40 *et seq.*). This unity of religion and politics, the book says, has been broken up during the course of history by the arrival of science and the schism in belief to such an extent that religious life is no longer a constitutive part of the whole but a matter for specific institutions, within a secular society, which are dominated by numerous non-religious but no less powerful associations ([CF] pp. 40 *et seq.*).

A parallel phenomenon, or alternatively an intellectual reflex to this “greatest revolution that has ever taken place in religions” was, in the 17th and 18th centuries, the idea of natural religion, which on the one hand was directed against the ruling institutions but on the other hand still clung to supranaturalism. This idea, which is related to that of the “natural man” and “natural law”, and arose from related structural forces in the same period of time, strengthened the congregation and thus weakened the power of the Church within the communal organisations ([CF] pp. 43 *et seq.*). The crucial aspects of this new situation were firstly that religion became a question for personal decision and secondly that it became possible, through the personal attitude of the believer, to take a religious approach to secular matters. This possibility went far beyond the bounds of a supranaturally orientated Church because it withdrew itself from all those fields in which the sciences had taken up occupation and thus had no further influence at all. It is with this phenomenon that Dewey emphasises the value of the “religious person” as opposed to “religion”; whilst “religion” thus became the expression of institutions and ceremonies, the argument went, which represented supranaturalistic teaching and appeared plurally in the world, the term “religious” was used to mean an attitude emancipated from “religion” and belonging somewhere in between supranaturalism and atheistic materialism. The central position is taken up by religious experience as a natural phenomenon, which can turn up in various situations in everyday life and possesses a force which creates harmony within the self and between the self and the world. “It is sometimes brought about by devotion to a

cause; sometimes by a passage of poetry that opens a new perspective; sometimes as was the case with Spinoza – deemed an atheist in his day – through philosophical reflection” ([CF] p. 11). This kind of experience leads to a change in the inner attitude to the world, a change that is far more comprehensive and profound than the phenomenon that can be regarded in the Darwinian sense as adaptation to changed surroundings and which ultimately “includes a note of submission” ([CF] p. 13). This attitude is not caused externally, but willingly, and also not through any *one* specific decision or expression of intent but in relation to a *whole*: “It is a change of will conceived as the organic plenitude of our being, rather than any special change *in* will” ([CF] p. 13). As a result of this, Dewey is able to say: “The conception that ‘religious’ signifies a certain attitude and outlook, independent of the supranatural, necessitates no such division” ([CF] p. 45). Overcoming the dichotomy between the supranatural and the natural, or in other words the emancipation of the “religious person” from “religion”, is Dewey’s key to understanding the human being and the world as a totality, because (only) the religious attitude of the human being is capable of humanising the secular world. True “good” lies not in the next world but within our own experience of the world ([CF] p. 47).

One of the core terms in this concept is the imagination. Dewey postulated that this is the only organ that is capable of “recognising” and creating harmony within the self and between the self and the world. “The idea of a whole, whether of the whole personal being or of the world, is an imaginative, not a literal, idea. The limited world of our observation and reflection becomes the Universe only through imaginative extension. It cannot be apprehended in knowledge, nor realized in reflection” ([CF] p. 14). To form the link between ideality and imagination, faith takes its place with its moral and practical significance. “Conviction in the moral sense signifies being conquered, vanquished, in our active nature by an ideal end” ([CF] p. 15). If this moral conviction now wakens feelings which are supported by the striving for unity, Dewey claims that “religiousness” will emerge in the sense of “morality touched by emotion” ([CF] p. 16), and that this religious attitude will determine the quality of the person’s social and political life. “The religious attitude signifies something that is bound through imagination to a *general* attitude. (...) The quality of attitude is displayed in art, science, and good citizenship” ([CF] p. 17).

This thus creates the link to the subject under discussion here. Science is the medium through which knowledge and truth are created, which in turn are disseminated through art and discussed discursively by the citizens. The search for knowledge and truth runs through patient, co-operative research in the sense of observation, experiment, and reflection. The outcome of all this does not contradict religious truths because, with the emancipation of the religious person from religion, experience itself becomes the place where “religiousness” happens ([CF] p. 23). However, this ideal means that science must divorce itself from “mechanicalism” ([CF] p. 37) in order, firstly, to arrive at a holistic understanding of Nature. “The change gives aspiration for natural knowledge a definitely religious

character, since growth in the understanding of nature is seen to be organically related to the formation of ideal ends" ([CF] p. 38). Secondly, however, the ideal can be applied to the social sciences as well, which have up to now only been rudimentary in structure ([CF] p. 50) because the ideology of individualism and the *laissez-faire* system ultimately denies the possibility of intelligent intervention in human behaviour. The necessary prerequisite is that intelligence has to be seen less in connection with the old attitude of reason but much more in connection with practice: with feelings. "Moreover, there is no opposition between it and emotion. There is such a thing as passionate intelligence, as ardor on behalf of light shining into the murky places of social existence, and as zeal for its refreshing and purifying effect" ([CF] p. 52). This thus formulates the ideal of the "kind of knowledge and insight" that Dewey was calling for in "The Public and its Problems" ([PP] p. 166).

In this respect, humanity does form a community but one that is constituted not by the transcendently based belief that we are all God's children but by a "mysterious totality of being" which one can call the "Universe" ([CF] p. 56). This is in line with the anthropological statement that human beings possess, or have developed, a facility directed – towards participation and sympathy, justice, equality, and freedom ([CF] p. 54).

In the mutual, co-operative, and discursive exchange of thoughts, people can form a "comprehensive community" ([CF] p. 56) which, directly because it has overcome the dichotomy and thus both supranaturalism and "mechanicalism", meets the requirements for the ideal of democracy.<sup>19</sup> "I cannot understand how any realization of the democratic ideal as a vital moral and spiritual ideal in human affairs is possible without surrender the conception of the basic division to which supranatural Christianity is committed" ([CF] pp. 55 *et seq.*). What is now needed is to waken this latent religious faith in people: "Here are the elements for a religious faith that shall not be confined to sect, class, or race. Such a faith has always been implicitly the common faith of mankind. It remains to make it explicit and militant" ([CF] p. 58).

#### 4.2. THE PEDAGOGIC DIMENSION

Under these premises it is easy to understand the lofty position that education and training have for the creation, maintenance, and further development of democracy. The fundamental significance of educational science is thus not limited to the institution of the school. Even if Dewey does not himself mention this analogy, he does aim towards a certain emancipation for the educational from the institution in the same way as in the relationship between religion and religious people. Education must therefore not be delegated, because that would force the fundamental pedagogic impetus of life as such out of all other social areas. Dewey may not have been aiming for the abolition of schools, but he was looking firstly for a fundamentally new relationship between school and the context of life and secondly for a "pedagogisation" of the context of life itself.

#### 4.2.1. *The pedagogic interpretation of the face-to-face communities*

Strengthening the local communities in connection with the establishment of the Great Community is connected with a fundamental pedagogic view in which the value of the small, local community is primarily regarded in its *educational* effect on the individual, and is expressly valued as such. Dewey, however, favours neither the individual nor the community; he prefers their mutual pedagogic impetus. If Dewey had not favoured the principles of pluralism and world-wide communications, the pedagogic effect would be asymmetric and the educational concept would be similar to that of communitarianism.<sup>20</sup> However, the principle of plurality leads a great deal further; together with world-wide communications, it is the means by which the individual can be formed holistically. In this respect, Dewey's approach aims for an individual who does not represent any contradiction to the social context and sees his rights as secured against it, but for one who can only come into existence within the social context and is inextricably bound up with it. That is why the concept of "co-operation" is wrong in the sense in which Honneth uses it; what is involved here is far more a concept of the "constitution". In this connection, Dewey's demarcation makes particularly good sense, especially when he turns against any organological view of the community as it is encountered often enough in communitarianism. Dewey's view is that the human being is probably born as an organic being which is connected with others, but not as a member of a community. *Education* becomes a genuine medium through which young people can be introduced into the traditions, philosophies, and interests of the community. Education therefore means not simply the development of inherent abilities but the learning of something specifically human, and that means communication through symbols. "The problem of securing diffused and seminal intelligence can be solved only to the degree in which local communal life becomes a reality. Signs and symbols, language, are the means of communication by which a fraternally shared experience is ushered in and sustained" ([PP] pp. 217 *et seq.*). Therefore, one particular point in "A Common Faith" takes on a particular pedagogic and moral significance which calls for recognition of the fact "that goods actually experienced in the concrete relations of family, neighborhood, citizenship, pursuit of art and science, and what men actually depend upon for guidance and support, and that their reference to a supranatural and other-worldly locus has obscured their real nature and has weakened their force" ([CF] p. 47).

#### 4.2.2. *The school as a state institution*

The question as to the role of the school is dealt with by Dewey exclusively in "Democracy and Education". Although there are problems of interpretation with the necessary *retrospective view* from 1927 or 1934 back to the work that appeared in 1916, it does give it a deeper meaning which Dewey had probably worked out for it, as he regarded it as one of his most important ones. From this focus it becomes clear that the school, which according to "Democracy and Education"

is only necessary in the more highly developed societies whose social heritages have become more complex ([DE] p. 19), is in reality a 'continuation' of the world of everyday life and has to be directly connected to it. Because, according to Dewey, every experience contains religious elements, and school has to be directly connected to the living world, school ultimately acquires a religious character.

Between this universal-harmonious ideal and the fact that schools are organised by the state there arises a problem; as a state institution it is in danger of conducting citizen-education, as did in fact happen in Germany in the 19th century. Dewey derives from this state of affairs one of the basic problems of present-day educational science: "One of the fundamental problems of education in and for a democratic society is set by the conflict of a nationalistic and a wider social aim" ([DE] p. 97). The historical problem is articulated in the contradiction that on the one hand science, art, and trade (both in their ideal and also in their mechanised forms) ignore national frontiers, and on the other hand the political independence of states has never been so strongly emphasised. "This contradiction . . . , exacts of educational theory a clearer conception of the meaning of 'social' as a function and test of education than has yet been attained" ([DE] p. 97).

The meaning of "social" becomes clear from the discussion of the "mystic totality" of all human beings. The possibility of setting up an education system within a national state, the aims of which are not nationally restricted depend, in Dewey's view, on two preconditions: firstly, the need to overcome class distinctions, and secondly the need to reconcile patriotism with cosmopolitanism ([DE] pp. 97 *et seq.*). The first precondition reflects the rejection of any kind of dualism that Dewey makes at a number of points and finds its solution in the overcoming of the contradiction between pure and applied science and education; the aim is to make knowledge, completely divorced from supranaturalism and mechanicalism, something that people in their normal circumstances of life can experience, learn, discuss, and thus use. The second condition aims to enable "nations to participate in shared human aims and objectives regardless of geographical frontiers" (national frontiers being of secondary importance). A school designed along these lines is "social" because it meets both the necessary requirements of the idea of education "as a freeing of individual capacity in a progressive growth directed to social aims" ([DE] p. 98).

Looked at this way, the school has three tasks. It must provide a "simplified environment" from which the pupils can learn about it. It must exclude the influence of valueless and devaluing elements in the existing environment as much as possible in order to create "a purified atmosphere of action", so that a "better society" can emerge. The definition of "values" is obviously not derived from transcendental premises but from the analysis of the conditions that make social communication possible. And thirdly, the school is the place in which "the various factors in the social surroundings" are balanced off against one another, so that "each individual gets an opportunity to escape from the limitations of the social group into which he was born, and to come into living contact with a

broader environment” ([DE] p. 20). The school thus becomes a “prototype of the society” that matches Dewey’s ideal, so that the “minds” can be shaped which will “gradually modify the larger and more recalcitrant features of adult society” ([DE] p. 317).

## 5. Concluding Comments

It has been the aim of this investigation to show that the various references to Dewey are understandable, but to this extent offer theoretical problems when Dewey’s central premises are taken out of the picture. This reveals an astounding parallel with Rousseau to the extent that, in light of the irretrievable loss of the “golden age” (the American communities), he no longer thinks of a locally limited citizen but radically gives preference to the holistically educated person. Whereas this option was in Rousseau’s “Emile” still the expression of an emphatically republican reaction which in the end will largely return,<sup>21</sup> in Dewey it is religiously inspired evolution: the ideal of the human being holistically educated to a totality, not educated outside corrupt society but within strengthened face-to-face communities through informed, mutual discourse. Assertions that attribute Dewey with modernity must make these facts transparent and validate them critically. They would owe that to Dewey’s approach.

## Acknowledgement

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> From 1993 to 1999, almost 250 titles appeared in English and German on Dewey’s educational theories alone.

<sup>2</sup> Please refer to some of the other articles in this book. The entire book as such shows that it is regarded as worthwhile to study Dewey in depth.

<sup>3</sup> Both sides will be encountered in this article. Whilst the references to Dewey affect him as a person and his concepts, Dewey himself (in much the same way as Rousseau) looked back yearningly to an earlier “Golden Age”.

<sup>4</sup> He also cited governments made up of “medicine-men” or “priests”.

<sup>5</sup> Following the same lines as the political theory that raises the natural individual to the highest level of sovereignty, philosophical knowledge theorists had turned to “the self, or ego, in the form of personal consciousness identified with mind itself” ([PP] p. 83) and thus argued in favour of a very effective dualism of mind and world which dominated ideas in educational science for a long time (Democracy and Education [DE] 1916, p. 90).

<sup>6</sup> For instance, the major criticism of Rawls definition of community, to which he gives a highly individualistic slant in accordance with his theory and consequently assumes co-operation between individuals with similar aims and feelings: “Rawls’ account is individualistic in the sense of assuming the antecedent individuation of the subject of co-operation, whose actual motivations may include benevolent aims as well as selfish ones” (Sandel, 1982, pp. 148 *et seq.*; see p. 161). Although Sandel recognises that Rawls, with his “sentimental conception”, goes far beyond the “instrumental



conception” which is only based on self-interest, but still does not go far enough, because he cannot see that community is a “mode of self-understanding” (p. 150). In this respect, a community in his view describes not only “what they *have* as fellow citizens but also what they *are*, not a relationship they choose . . . but an attachment they discover, not merely an attribute but a constituent of their identity” (p. 150). Only when the individual has been defined in this constituted way can it undertake any self-reflection. “But to be capable of a more thoroughgoing reflection [than only perceiving the contingent desires and aspirations, DT], we cannot be wholly unencumbered subjects of possession, individuated in advance and given prior to our ends, but must be subjects constituted in part by our central aspirations and attachments, always open, indeed vulnerable, to growth and transformation in the light of revised self-understanding” (p. 172).

<sup>7</sup> Two other aspects are worthy of mention which are in accordance with Dewey’s criticism of “individualism”. The first refers to the high level of attractiveness which Sandel, like Dewey, awards to this “ideology”. The idea of an individual released from social contexts makes it sovereign, “cast as the author of the only moral meanings there are” (Sandel, 1984, p. 87); accordingly, this theory is more attractive than tenable. “This is an exhilarating promise, and the liberalism it animates is perhaps the fullest expression of the Enlightenment’s quest for the self-defining subject. But is it true?” (p. 87). This brings us to the second aspect. Like Dewey, Sandel places the origin of the “ideology” of individualism in the 17th century, although in this case not for reasons of political evolution but because of the development of the free (secular) sciences: “Where neither Nature nor cosmos supplies a meaningful order to be grasped or apprehended, it falls to human subjects to constitute a meaning on their own. This would explain the prominence of contract theory from Hobbes onward, and the corresponding emphasis on voluntarist as against cognitive ethics culminating in Kant. What can no longer be found remains somehow to be created” (Sandel, 1982, pp. 175 *et seq.*).

<sup>8</sup> In the “Good Society”, in 1991, Bellah, following explicitly in the footsteps of Dewey (Bellah, 1991, p. 305), rejects the view that the old communities should be revived, because, as he says even later, such an undertaking would be nostalgic (Bellah, 1998, p. 15). Nevertheless, the question remains as to how society can become a *good* society. The victorious ideology of “ontological individualism”, he said, called for a correction because it had ignored the “life-world”: “This ideological world is a world without families. It is also a world without neighbourhoods, ethnic communities, churches, cities, and towns, even nations (as opposed to states)” (p. 17). And the “life-world” consists – here the similarity to Dewey is surprising – of mutual communication. “The life-world missing in these . . . ideologies is the place where we communicate with others, deliberate, come to agreements about standards and norms, pursue in common an effort to create a valuable form of life – in short, the lifeworld is the world of community” (p. 17). The *good* society is therefore, to put it more exactly, the good *community*, under the heading of “democratic communitarianism”, which does admittedly acknowledge the sanctity of the individual but at the same time states that it can only be attained through the social context. Although, according to Bellah, the “face-to-face community” is important, and he would like to see it strengthened, democratic communitarianism is a concept that can be applied to groupings of any size, “and ultimately to the world as a community” (p. 19). However, strictly speaking he overcomes communitarianism here and is confronted by similar problems, as will be shown here to exist in Dewey’s work.

<sup>9</sup> Taylor (1989) was probably the first to draw attention to the difference, by separating ontological from normative questions: at the ontological level, communitarianism and republicanism share a holistic view of the world, whilst the communitarianists take sides with the community in the forefront and the republicans with the individual – a position which Taylor himself takes up. This differentiation was significantly expanded in later discussions, which are still going on today (Pettit, 1993, 1997; Spitz, 1995). Although Dewey shares the ontological premises of both, he does not allow himself to be placed in either of these categories because for theoretical reasons he is not willing to give an unambiguous answer to the question of taking sides (see 3.3.).

<sup>10</sup> Taylor, however, who in the face of communitarianism decides in favour of the republican alternative to liberalism (see Footnote 9), is described by Ryan as being unconsciously a pupil of Dewey. “Charles Taylor, who is for the most part a Deweyan without knowing it . . .” (Ryan, 1995, p. 361).

<sup>11</sup> De Capitani reconstructs the history of republicanism as a freedom movement against the monarchies, primarily on the basis of the symbols and emblems from the time of the Roman republic through into the 18th century. The most important symbol, which later turned up on coins and coats-of-arms, was the *pileus*, or “cap of freedom”, which was placed on the heads of slaves in Rome to show that they had been given their freedom. This symbol was later joined by the dagger with which Brutus murdered Caesar, and the *facies* as a symbol of unity (de Capitani, 1991 and 2000). This negative focus, however, applies only to the historical dimension, and looked at systematically republicanism stands for a positive definition of freedom because it means thereby the right of participation in the business of government or, in modern republicanism, the right to delegate this participation to representatives.

<sup>12</sup> See also the fundamental thesis of John G.A. Pocock, 1979.

<sup>13</sup> “Primarily, a very small state in which the people can readily meet together and in which each citizen can easily know all the others” (3rd Book, 4th Chapter, *ÆC* III, p. 405).

<sup>14</sup> Rousseau’s reference to Montesquieu relates to the following points in “The Spirit of Laws” (1748): “It does not take very much integrity for a monarchical or despotic government to maintain or sustain itself. The force of the law on the one hand, the constantly raised arm of the prince on the other hand, govern or contain everything. However, in a people’s state, one additional resource is necessary: VIRTUE” (3rd Book, 3rd Chapter, *ÆC* II, p. 251). Accordingly, the laws of different states are directed towards different aims. “In monarchies, (laws) have the aim of honour; in republics, virtue; in despocracies, fear” (4th Book, 1st Chapter, *ÆC* II, p. 262).

<sup>15</sup> In “Democracy and Education”, Dewey mainly uses the terms “community” and “society” synonymously, but is not yet working with the opposite term “Community” as in “Great Society”.

<sup>16</sup> This designation is confusing in the sense that communitarianist criticism uses the terms “procedural liberalism” to describe the kind of liberalism it criticises, and “procedural republic” to describe a state of this kind (see, for instance: Sandel, 1984). Honneth, in turn, simply calls this a “liberal political definition”, which he sets up in opposition to the two “radical-democratic” models (pp. 37 *et seq.*; see also note 2).

<sup>17</sup> This problem should not be confused with the *programmatic* problem to which both Westbrook (pp. 316 *et seq.*) and Kaufman-Osborn (1984) have drawn attention, namely the question of how the face-to-face communities are to be restored. The problem being discussed here is of a *fundamental* nature.

<sup>18</sup> Dewey’s rejection of natural law makes it impossible to compare his theory with a current in republican thinking in the 18th century which developed republicanism on the basis of natural law in exactly the direction that Dewey was now taking as well: towards cosmopolitanism. The foundation of this is the human element that has to subjugate itself to love of one’s own mother country, as Mably gave such prominence to in 1763: “This virtue, which is superior to love of one’s own country, is the love of humanity” (p. 148). Similarly, the Basle state secretary Isaak Iselin wrote in 1764 of “base” patriotism, the driving forces of which are usually “ignorance, habit, and pride”, which has to be distinguished from “the noble love of one’s country”, which is an “outpouring of the purest love of humanity” (1764a, pp. 138 *et seq.*). He also gained great attention with his work “On the History of Humanity”, in which the future is described as follows: “Not until then will true freedom emerge as being infinitely more loveable than the apparent independence of the republicans in all their glory . . . and then love, the only true virtue in any constitution, will pour out its blessed influences triumphantly over all sorts and conditions of men” (1764b, Volume 2, pp. 386 *et seq.*).

<sup>19</sup> Rockefeller’s book pursues the thesis that Dewey’s aim in life lay in this synthesis of science and faith (1991).

<sup>20</sup> It is surprising that, despite the predisposition of communitarianism for a theory of education, there are hardly any works that devote themselves to this subject. Individual chapters within

the standard works of communitarianism remain so totally on the surface that they can hardly be allowed to claim any relevance to educational science (see Etzioni, 1993, pp. 54–116; Bellah, 1991, pp. 145–178). The one exception is an essay by Helen Haste in which she starts from psychological prerequisites but goes no further (1996).

<sup>21</sup> Rousseau's concept of human education in "Emile" (1762) is a polemical attack on the situation in which the political context still only permitted the education of the degenerate and corrupt *bourgeoisie* and not of the *citoyen*, the republican citizen. See Daniel Tröhler, 1999.

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