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Introduction

At the twenty-third Annual Conference of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in 1932, John Dewey addressed his audience on the topic of the Great Depression. He highlighted the opportunity for more expansive democratic change that the economic crisis represented:

> The paradise of folly in which we have been living has broken down. That at least is some gain. It is something to become aware of the need for new ideas, new measures, new policies, new leaders, to bring about a great social reconstruction. More specifically, I think our depression has compelled us to think more fundamentally on social matters, economic matters, political matters, than we have been thinking for many years.[1]

As I write the introduction to this volume, the United States President Barack Obama has just reached his one-hundredth day in office. President Obama sees in this moment of global economic crisis, as Dewey did in 1932, an opportunity to push something akin to a "reset" button. In his Inaugural Address, Obama stated that the country must "begin again the work of remaking America." The approach he offers resonates with that of Dewey. It rejects absolutisms, or "worn out dogmas" as Obama put it, and is open and experimental, making tough choices not on the basis of fixed ideological preferences, but on the basis of "whether it works," and works in a way consistent with America's founding principles – or, as Dewey thought about it, America's democratic culture. Part of that democratic culture for Dewey was a faith in what Americans can create when they put individual intelligence to work on common problems. Dewey called for a "speculative audacity," a faith in ideas liberated from "timidity."[2] Obama's politics is based on a similar idea

of hope, tied, as he said at his inauguration, to a notion that America's achievements have been founded not upon the "sum of our individual ambitions," but upon what individuals who realize their connections with others have done and will do in the future. He concluded his Inaugural Address with a call for "a new era of responsibility – a recognition, on the part of every American, that we have duties to ourselves, our nation, and the world."[3]

Over the last twenty years there has been a resurgence of interest in the work of John Dewey across a number of disciplines, reflecting the wide range of his intellectual pursuits in areas such as philosophy, political thought, psychology, education, communication studies, religion, art, and aesthetics. However, I draw upon the example of the new Obama administration to begin this introduction because Dewey himself would have been less interested in seeing his work invoked in the latest scholarly debates than in seeing intelligence and experimentalism applied to actually existing human problems of today. He would want to see evidence that, across more areas of life, individuals were developing the best in themselves, adapting successfully to and finding meaning in changed social and environmental conditions through cooperative problem-solving. The honing of human intelligence with a view to finding improved means of human coping was a lifelong aim of Dewey's and is reflected across the breadth of his writing. As Steven Rockefeller writes, for Dewey, "no moral value stands above critical evaluation and reconstruction, especially in times of social transition. The vital moral issue is to use experimental intelligence and a knowledge of conditions and consequences to guide this process wisely."[4]

Dewey was a major figure of the American intellectual and cultural landscape during the first half of the twentieth century and he published academic writing as well as political journalism over almost seventy years, his collected works spanning thirty-seven volumes. He lived to the age of ninety-two, having been born the year in which Charles Darwin published *The Origin of Species* (1859), and he died in 1952 when America detonated the first hydrogen bomb. He was a child of the American Civil War, witnessed two World Wars, and lived to see the emergence of the Cold War and the start of the Korean War. Dewey was both a philosopher and a public intellectual who devoted his mental energies to thinking about the social and cultural changes that were impacting his world. He argued that

philosophy should do the same. Dewey was compelled to write about deep-running tensions such as those generated by scientific advances and the values of the day (evolutionary science and religious belief as well as the impact of the atomic age); war and democratic ends; and the advantages of capitalism and industrialism being associated with many dislocations and inequities (one could say that both Dewey and Karl Marx critiqued capitalism from a humanist vantage point).

Dewey was not the originator of the American tradition of philosophy known as pragmatism. Its founder was Charles Sanders Peirce, and he had a notable influence upon Dewey. However, Dewey played an important role in popularizing pragmatism and making it a public philosophy. In particular, his instrumentalism served to put flesh on the bones of what Peirce and William James, another important figure in the founding of this tradition, provided as its basic insight – that inquiry into the practical effects of our thought and action is the most important thing we humans do. Also, Dewey furnished pragmatism with an ethical theory that neither Peirce nor James provided, even though James's philosophy had a decidedly moral concern.[5]

Despite its early twentieth-century impact upon philosophy, both in America and beyond, the influence of pragmatism had waned by the 1950s and Dewey's once iconic status was forgotten. Both were overtaken by developments in analytical philosophy and the widening appeal of the formal methods of logical positivism in contrast to the seeming imprecision of pragmatism, with its focus upon the roles of change and contingency in human experience, and upon our reflections about how to adapt in relation to that experience. Today, however, the will to know a "real" world, the aim of analytical philosophy and of the less formal method of ordinary language analysis too, is under attack. Dewey's own sustained attack against traditional philosophy and its end goal – an ahistorical, universal knowledge of absolutes – has been revitalized by writers such as Richard Bernstein, Richard Rorty, and Hilary Putnam. They draw attention to Dewey's non-foundational approach to philosophy formulated before either Ludwig Wittgenstein or Martin Heidegger, and Rorty credits Dewey, more than anyone, with influencing his own approach to philosophy as cultural critique.[6]

Most important to the reconstruction of philosophy that Dewey wanted to affect was his theory of inquiry. His intention was to give philosophy a direct, organic relationship to lived experience and

provide a method by which individuals could exist better in the world. Dewey was influenced by the evolutionary theory of Darwin and believed that humans are adaptive beings who shape and are shaped by their natural and social environments. Inquiry into any kind of problem, whether it is a problem of the natural or the social world, is best modeled upon scientific method. The only significant dissimilarity between the two types of problem is one of starting point, and it is a difference of complexity in particular. Inquiry in natural science begins with natural phenomena. Social scientific inquiry begins with moral questions about human problems, asking what "ought" to be done. The latter is more complex than inquiry in natural science since it cannot engage in the selective abstractions that natural science can without being reduced too much to the physical, overlooking subjective human factors. Nonetheless, the logical conditions of the two are the same. Both kinds of inquiry are grounded in experience – the facts of an indeterminate situation. And the end point of each is the same: to gain a sense of determinacy by being able to make a "warranted assertion." However, any such resolution was understood by Dewey always to be provisional, merely a resting place for inquiry. As he wrote: "conclusions of special inquiries are parts of an enterprise that is continually renewed, or is a going concern."[7] New indeterminacies arise, solutions that worked before become unstuck, and one is forced to begin inquiry again.

Dewey's philosophy was concept-led rather than concept-driven. Concept-driven philosophy suffered Dewey's most stinging rebukes in *The Reconstruction of Philosophy* for being a species of philosophical analysis for analysis's sake rather than seeing concepts as tools that could be usefully applied in thinking about human problems scientifically. According to Dewey, the conceptual vocabulary of traditional philosophy needed to be re-worked with this in mind. There were many concepts that received reconstructive treatment of this kind by Dewey, but three such concepts will be discussed here briefly as examples central to his work: experience, intelligence, and situation.

Experience refers to both physical nature and the interaction of living things with their environment. Dewey's naturalism rejected the dualistic separation of humans from their environment found in Cartesian epistemology. His understanding of experience as context

was dynamic. Humans acting and knowing in the world change the world, and both biological and cultural forces condition human experience as well. While he did not equate experience with knowledge, he argued that experience yields method, since for both biological and emotional reasons we make use of experience, noting its functional constancies and acting upon those constancies to refine the ways in which we draw from experience, thereby improving upon it. Thus, his was an instrumentalist view of experience that sought to control and direct experience where possible. "We use our past experiences to construct new and better ones in the future. The very fact of experience thus includes the process by which it directs itself in its own betterment."[8] Thus, that process – inquiry arising from the problematic situations of human experience – is ameliorative.

The concept of intelligence also has a central place in Dewey's thought. Dewey sought to avoid the pitfalls he found in the concept of reason as it had been used in traditional philosophy and noted the contrast between the two, writing that "intelligence is as practical as reason is theoretical."[9] Human intelligence starts with experience, but is critical and future-oriented. It is not instrumental in the sense of being a means for "mechanically" producing a predetermined end. Instead, it is instrumental in another sense. It is an imaginative and creative "organ" that guides the "transformation of past into future," and has import for "all the disciplines which have an intimate connection with human conduct: – to logic, ethics, esthetics, economics, and the procedure of the sciences formal and natural."[10] When considering the value of any conclusion, Dewey believed the method by which it is reached is all-important, and argued that "the perfecting of method, the perfecting of intelligence, is the thing of supreme value."[11] Using the method of intelligence for the purpose of enriching human experience was ethically significant for Dewey. The process of perfecting or refining intelligence leads to "growth," which he saw as the only moral end,[12] and what counts as growth can only be determined in the process of inquiry. However, according to Dewey, growth requires that individuals and social institutions take responsibility for improving the method of intelligence and critically examine its social use, because he thought that intelligence was not innate, nor could it be honed successfully in isolation. Dewey also believed that, in order to mature, intelligence needed a "free and stable society,"[13] and thus growth required a democratic culture

that cultivated "cooperative intelligence."[14] In his 1932 *Ethics*, Dewey wrote: "the effective socialization of intelligence is probably the greatest problem of democracy today."[15]

Situation was another important concept for Dewey's theory of inquiry, integrating the human agent with the conditions of her environment or sphere of action. Context was everything for Dewey, and he argued that traditional philosophy failed to understand its significance; as Dewey wrote, metaphysical procedure worked independently of "the limits of a historic or developing situation."[16] However, he believed that it was the quality of indeterminacy in connection with a situation that initiated inquiry. An indeterminate situation is one in which "its constituents do not hang together."[17] The sense of confusion engendered by a situation, rendering it problematic, sparks action that seeks to alter that status quo. In Dewey's words, "*The function of reflective thought is, therefore, to transform a situation in which there is experienced obscurity, doubt, conflict, disturbance of some sort, into a situation that is clear, coherent, settled, harmonious*."[18] Action of this kind is framed within the way a situation is characterized as a problem, and moves forward through hypothesis formation that proposes solutions and possible outcomes. Imagination is critical in projecting hypothetical outcomes, but it is ultimately constrained by the conditions of the situation. Any solution must have a "functional fitness" to the problem at hand,[19] and the success of an inquiry is determined by whether the plan of action suggested by a hypothesis and its execution, the experiment, makes coherent the conflict that was originally felt to be a problem.

In the essays that follow, more comment upon Dewey's theory of inquiry, these three concepts, and about growth and habit in Dewey's thought will be provided as they pertain to the areas of research represented in the volume. The contributors also devote space to explaining Dewey's naturalism, organicism, and his instrumentalism or experimentalism. Controversies in connection with Dewey's instrumentalism and scientism – for example, whether scientific method can go as far in securing social well-being as Dewey suggests – are also discussed.

The above are familiar themes that reappear, linking Dewey's thought on the numerous subjects that captured his interest. The intent of the volume is to capture those themes and reflect the

wide range of his intellectual interests. Thus, the reader will find in this volume chapters on the topics of metaphysics; epistemology; philosophy of the mind; cognitive science; psychology; moral philosophy; the philosophies of religion, art, and education; and democratic political and international theory. The breadth of subject-matter displayed here, due to the extensive reach of Dewey's philosophy, makes this particular *Companion* in the Cambridge series somewhat unusual. Consequently, contributors to the volume have been asked where needed to provide brief accounts of the "state of the art" in the fields addressed here, keeping readers who may be new to these subjects in mind. The argument one finds often repeated across the areas surveyed here – that Dewey has left an intellectual imprint worthy of our critical attention today – is quite humbling to us all who are aspiring or practicing academicians.

The opening chapter by Robert Westbrook provides an intellectual biography of John Dewey, addressing his early Hegelianism and then his turn to pragmatism, and isolates democracy as the "intellectualized wish" that lends coherence to the diversity of his pursuits as both a scholar and an activist.

The next four chapters examine Dewey's instrumental logic of inquiry and naturalistic metaphysics. Ruth Anna Putnam introduces the reader to what Dewey believed to be the central problem of philosophy – in her words, "how to preserve the authority of the values that guide our lives in an age that gives supreme cognitive authority to science" – and she explains that Dewey's answer, overcoming the separation between theory and practice, was the aim of his theory of inquiry or instrumental theory of knowledge. Richard M. Gale's chapter explains Dewey's idea of nature as *Lebenswelt*. Gale provides an account of Dewey's metaphysics of naturalism and the themes of experience as background, continuity, and organicism, which in his opinion retain a Hegelian will to unity despite Dewey's appeal to the generic traits of existence. Gale looks at examples of Dewey's naturalism applied to epistemology, aesthetics, ethics, and religion to support his view that Dewey's naturalism is of an anthropomorphic or humanistic kind. Isaac Levi discusses Dewey's logic of inquiry. In particular, Levi emphasizes the normative element in Dewey's understanding of the ultimate subject of logic, writing that what sets Dewey's logic of inquiry apart from Peirce's is that Dewey "held that in inquiry, we seek to change situations – not states of

belief or points of view," downplaying the value of truth in inquiry. This casual attitude to truth is not something Levi admires in Dewey, but he believes that the great strength of Dewey's model of inquiry is the way it generalizes the logic of scientific inquiry, and finds that logic reflected in the realms of politics, art, and morals, bridging the gap between these cultural practices and science. J. E. Tiles explores Dewey's anti-epistemological epistemology and examines his experimental empiricism. Tiles explains the significance of the concept of habit for Dewey's empiricism, and his genetic account of the development of habitual responses through the process of inquiry, and argues that Dewey's particular brand of experimentalism is capable of delivering norms of science. Tiles argues that Dewey did so "in a way that totally abstracted from the use of mathematical forms in empirical inquiry" and with a view to demonstrating that "even forms of reasoning answer to experience."

The next set of chapters looks at Dewey's theory of mind and action theory as they relate to cognitive science. Mark Johnson explains that Dewey's naturalism, defined by the principle of continuity, produced a non-dualistic concept of the mind and Dewey's felt need to coin the term "body–mind." Johnson argues that almost fifty years before cognitive science was developed as a field, Dewey constructed a broad philosophical framework for understanding the implications of contemporary cognitive science – in particular, his insights about how the mind is both embodied and imaginative – even though cognitive science today would require us to update some of Dewey's claims about how the mind works. Matthias Jung examines Dewey's theory of action and speaks to its significance for cognitive science and social theory too. Jung writes that the concept of action has wide application across a range of disciplines, but that despite the diversity of thought about action and its uses, its conceptualization is largely shaped by either rational choice theory or normative theories of action. Dewey's particular contribution to action theory, according to Jung, is that Dewey offers a rather attractive alternative to the two: a concept of action that emphasizes the importance of situation, corporeality and sociality, and identifies habit and embodied creativity as universals in human action.

The following two chapters look at Dewey's moral theory. Jennifer Welchman explains that Dewey was an ethical naturalist who believed, in contrast to non-cognitivists such as Hume (also an ethical

naturalist), that values are responsive to reason and empirically verifiable. However, unlike many cognitive naturalists, Dewey was not a moral realist, since for Dewey a value judgment is a judgment about what course of action best fulfills a function. It is practical, and practical moral judgments are especially complex because they involve making choices between different possible resolutions that reflect on the agent herself personally as well as impacting on the outcomes she wants to affect. Welchman describes Dewey's problem with noncognitivism and the way he seeks to reconstruct ethical naturalism, discussing his treatments of our moral psychology, valuation, practical deliberation, and what they mean for normative theory. James Bohman picks up from where Welchman leaves off, exploring the social reform element of Dewey's ameliorative naturalist ethics. Bohman writes that, in contrast to social psychologists of his day, Dewey's moral and social psychology offered a vigorous defense of democracy and human rationality and sought to overcome the idea that social reform meant that: "either changing institutions requires first changing human sentiment, or changing human nature requires first changing institutions. The Deweyan alternative incorporates elements of both horns." Bohman examines Dewey's moral theory in light of the debate over these two ideas of social reform continuing today, and concludes that Dewey's contextualist approach to moral and social psychology remains worthwhile, as does his practical aim of improving moral judgments with a view to making them better suited to the social changes brought on by industrialization.

The chapters by Sami Pihlström, Richard Eldridge, and Nel Noddings examine Dewey's writings on religion, aesthetics, and education respectively. Pihlström describes the socially grounded, naturalist conception of religious faith that Dewey developed in his work *A Common Faith*, and in other writings, and places his religious thought in the context of the metaphysics vs. antimetaphysics debate that permeates twentieth-century philosophy of religion. According to Pihlström, Dewey's contributions in this area are other instances of his general proclivity to reconstruct patterns of thought, and dichotomous thinking in particular, since he "attacks the traditionally sharp dualism between the spiritual and the secular or profane," as well as mediates the divide between metaphysics and the critique of metaphysics. However, Pihlström acknowledges this problem: does Dewey's naturalization of the religious qualities of experience

transform religious experience into something else? Richard Eldridge explains that Dewey's approach to the philosophy of art was motivated by his will to link art and its philosophy to wider human problems, and in particular to reconnect meaning with human action in modern industrial society. Eldridge explores two themes that organize Dewey's principal work in this area, *Art and Experience*, and discusses many of its topics, concluding that despite Stanley Cavell's criticism that Dewey tries to unite more than the modern world can allow, Eldridge is still inclined to recommend Dewey's vision of what philosophy, art, and imagination should aim for: creating "better modalities of life." Noddings offers an "appreciative critique" of Dewey's philosophy of education, examining it through the feminist lens of care theory. Noddings surveys five key topics in Dewey's extensive work on education: the child, the curriculum, learning and inquiry, democracy, and moral education. In doing so, Noddings argues that there is much overlap in the ways Dewey and care theorists conceive of the active nature of the child, the interactive curriculum, the importance of inquiry and critical thinking, and the need to develop and improve democratic ideas, but that Dewey falls short in failing to explicitly address the experience of women, especially in relation to an expanded curriculum and their moral education.

The last two chapters bring the volume back to where it began, with Dewey's democratic thought. Richard Bernstein aims to demonstrate how central democracy is to Dewey's philosophy and how rich his thinking about democracy is, working outside certain limitations in contemporary democratic theory associated with participatory, procedural, and deliberative democracy. However, Bernstein argues that there is not enough institutional analysis or sustained comment on the kind of economic reform or the integrative principle that his ideal of democracy required. My chapter examines Dewey's engagement with international politics, and his belief that Old World diplomacy should be replaced with a new international politics reconstructed along democratic lines. The chapter asks how Dewey understood the international situation in the early years of World War One, and what he thought experimentalism in this arena required. As during the Great Depression, Dewey saw in these decades of great international turbulence an opportunity to set a different "reset" button – one at the level of intersocietal interaction, extending the reach of democracy there too.