

# VISCERAL POLITICS AND HEURISTIC DEMOCRACY

VINCENT COLAPIETRO  
University of Rhode Island



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*... the immediate need, as far as I can see, is to affect the general temper of social discussion, and in the direction of introducing some degree of frankness and of humane sympathy<sup>1</sup>*

— John Dewey (1928)

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<sup>1</sup> All citations of *The Collected Works of John Dewey, 1882–1953*, edited by Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1967–1990), are made in accord with established practice: *The Early Works* cited as EW, *The Middle Works* as MW, or *The Later Works* as LW), followed by volume and page number. This citation for the used as an epigram is LW 3, 184. Hereafter all citations of these volumes will be internal. “Why I Am for [Al] Smith” (LW 3: 184-185) was originally published in *The New Republic*, 56 (1928), 320-21. As just indicated, I am citing *The Later Works of John Dewey*, volume 3, in accord with standard manner of citing this critical edition. It is pertinent to not only my paper but also the contributions to this issue by John J. Stuhr and Jennifer Hansen that Dewey explains his support for this candidate for president, in part, as a counter to the “bigotry and tolerance” (LW 3: 185) fueling the opposition to Smith. It might seem that today all too much frankness characterizes our social discussions and political debates. On the surface, the multifaceted attacks on “political correctness” would seem to be an attempt to render them franker. This is however for the most part illusory. While the immediate need today might be the same as the one Dewey identified in 1928, the ultimate goal is to transform politics from top to bottom, though in exactly the opposite way that Donald Trump is trying to accomplish, with some success. In a democratic polity, however, the temper, tone, and textures (or nuances) of our everyday discourses are of the utmost importance. It is, after all, in reference to democracy that William James stressed in “The Social Value of the College-Bred,” in *Essays, Comments, and Reviews* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press) the importance of tone (“By their tone are all things human lost or saved”), a point to which I will return.

I will seize this occasion<sup>2</sup> as an opportunity to reflect on neglected aspects of Dewey's social philosophy<sup>3</sup> and, then, to reflect on the crises of our time in light of insights garnered from such reflection. These are reflections on practice, for the sake of practice; they are the reflections of practitioners striving to carry on and, if required, transform endeavors in which they are implicated. The structure of this essay is, hence, not that of applying theoretical insights to practical problems.<sup>4</sup> For I reject as completely as Dewey did the tendency to grant priority to theory and, entangled with this, the model of applying theoretical insights to practical questions. Put positively, I am advocating *the primacy of practice*. Accordingly, theory is not to be pitted against practice but rather to be seen as itself an instance of practice, indeed, a vastly extended family of human practices in which a heuristic ethos<sup>5</sup> is a defining feature (practices in

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<sup>2</sup> I wrote an abridged version of this paper for the meeting of the Society Dewey held in conjunction with the Eastern Division of the APA (January 4<sup>th</sup>, 2018). As it turned out, I never made it to the meeting: extreme weather forced the cancellation of my flight. Even so, Professor Jessica Wahman graciously and, from all accounts, very effectively read this version *in absentia*. Of utmost relevance here, this paper was conceived, written, and revised in conjunction with those by Professors Stuhr and Hansen

<sup>3</sup> What William James proclaimed in *The Meaning of Truth* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978) about his humanistic version of the pragmatist orientation is even truer of Dewey's entire philosophy: it is "essentially a *social* philosophy, a philosophy of 'co,' in which conjunctions do the work" (238). In this regard, it is especially important to consider Dewey's "The Inclusive Philosophic Idea" (LW 3: 41-54). For Dewey, "the social *as a category* is as important in the critical evaluation of recent systems of thought as it is in direct application to problems of matter, life and mind" (LW3: 54; emphasis added).

<sup>4</sup> "Any experience savored and enjoyed for itself is," John Dewey suggests in *Unmodern Philosophy and Modern Philosophy*, "esthetic. Such experiences do not, however, of themselves constitute art. The esthetic becomes artistic only when its materials are re-ordered by doing something with actual materials, colors, sounds, words, wood and stone" (270). See, of course, also *Art as Experience* (LW 10: especially 30-41, also 53-63).

<sup>5</sup> By this expression, I simply mean a culture in which inquiry is not only highly prized but also woven into the everyday practices of ordinary people. Even for an experienced mechanic, fixing an engine might be taken as an opportunity to inquire into the intricate workings of a mechanism with which the individual is already intimately familiar. The best mechanics are the most inquisitive ones, refusing

which not only is a situation to be rendered determinate<sup>6</sup> in some critical respect but also ones in which the very efforts to accomplish this are themselves made into objects of inquiry, evaluated for what light they can throw on other such efforts). The critical distinction is not that between theoretical pursuits and practical undertakings, but one within the vast domain of our shared practices. Above all, it pertains to habits: “We are confronted [at every turn] with two kinds of habits, intelligent and routine” (MW 14, 51). On the one hand, there are endeavors in which the acquisition and exercise of habits proceeds apart from recourse to intelligence (to questioning, inquiring, experimenting, and much else), and, on the other, undertakings in which embodied agency and its situated enactment are taken to be incidental to these undertakings. This vision is, in part, what Dewey is trying to deconstruct.<sup>7</sup> *Practice* here is a name for mere routine, *theory* a name for disembodied intellection. The theoretician and, far more manifestly, the experimentalist are, however, flesh-and-

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simply to fall back on what they already, always attentive to the possibility that the problem before them demands creative ingenuity, not only the assured knowledge derived past experience. As Dewey notes in *Unmodern Philosophy and Modern Philosophy*, “one and the same operation is capable of being indivisibly ‘instrumental’ and ‘final.’ And even under present socio-economical institutional conditions one finds many a human being, labelled mechanic, who is an artist in this attitude to his work” (284).

<sup>6</sup> Recall here Dewey’s definition of inquiry. It is not amiss to recall Bertrand Russell’s criticism of this definition. “Inquiry is,” Dewey claimed in his *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*, “the controlled or directed transformation of an indeterminate situation into one that is so determinate in its constituent distinctions and relations as to convert the elements of the original situation into a unified whole” (LW 12: 104-105). In “Dewey’s New Logic,” published in *The Philosophy of John Dewey*, edited by Paul Arthur Schilpp (NY: Tudor, 1939), Russell replied: This cannot be right, since “the operations of a drill sergeant in transforming a collection of raw recruits into a regiment, of a bricklayer transforming a heap of bricks into a house” would be, upon Dewey’s definition, an instance of inquiry (143). While Russell took this to be a *reduction ad absurdum*, Dewey did not see a problem with stretching inquiry to include more than the manipulation of symbols. It is hard to see how counting the activity of rendering indeterminate *social* situations determinate in the manner specified by Dewey as an instance of inquiry would not benefit social life greatly.

<sup>7</sup> The aptness of this term comes to light when we realize that it designations the task of destructureing, not of destruction.

blood actors whose thoughts and interventions are entangled with the world. On the other side, even our most blind routines do not tend to be utterly devoid of the exercise of personal intelligence.<sup>8</sup> Inquiry is an art in the robust Deweyan sense and art is in turn a practice (LW 1: 268). Accordingly, the only distinction worth drawing is not between practice and theory, but between those modes of practice that are not intelligent, not inherently and immediately enjoyable, and those which are full of enjoyed meanings.” This is a distinction drawn within the realm of our practices, including those constitutive of our political institutions and thus our aspirational democracy.

Theory, properly understood, is not only the most practical thing in the world. Practice, properly conducted, is an instance of inquiry: it is through and through heuristic. What Dewey notes in one place he notes in numerous other ones. In a late manuscript, he stresses, “what has been said [about the biological origin of theoretical inquiry] does not signify that knowledge either should be or is subordinated to some [other] specific mode of practice or all modes of practice.” The reason why this is so is also important to recall: “For there is nothing in what has been said that militates against, knowing, inquiry, being capable of being itself an engrossing form of behavior, and thus a form of ‘practical’ behavior,” that is, a practice in its own right.<sup>9</sup> Inquiry is an art and, as such, it is in itself a means-ends continuum in which giving an esthetic form to a complex endeavor is a critical feature of the heuristic endeavor itself: inquirers craft of their

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<sup>8</sup> The adjective here (*personal* intelligence) is critical: it signifies the assumption of responsibility for what is said and done (see, e.g., LW 1: 179-80). To conceive individual intelligence (or reason) in opposition to customary action is, in Dewey’s judgment, part of the problem. It implies that intelligence is ready-made and custom is always merely second-hand. But, in some instances, customs are the very habits of our being and, in all cases, the acquisition of “personal rationality” depends on a nexus of social transactions (see, e.g., MW 14, 56).

<sup>9</sup> See William James, *Pragmatism and The Meaning of Truth* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 277-80. In *The Meaning of Truth*, he addresses the charge that pragmatism “ignores the theoretic interest” (277). He calls it “an absolutely wanton slander” and explains in detail why pragmatism fully recognizes – better, is fully capable of recognizing – the theoretic interest. See also John Dewey, *Unmodern Philosophy and Modern Philosophy*, edited by Phillip Deen (Carbondale, IL: SIU Press, 2012), 266.

tasks and results nothing less than a performance and a (more or less) integrated set of consolidated results having the salient features of an artistically executed performance or crafted material.

Nowhere is it more important to stress this point regarding the primacy of practice than in reference to questions with which we are preoccupied on this occasion. The arts of self-critical inquiry and those of self-governing associations are more intimately connected than we ordinarily realize.<sup>10</sup> To be sure, scientists do not arrive at a consensus by taking a vote, any more than associations govern themselves by becoming engrossed in inquiry for the sake of inquiry. Systemic exclusions are, however, as fatal to experimental investigation as they are to democratic associations, just as the precarious ethos of impartial inquiry is as vital to democratic institutions as it is to scientific endeavors.

Though certainly no Deweyan, Alasdair MacIntyre captures more than the spirit of Dewey's (and my Deweyan) advocacy of this commitment when he writes: "We need to begin with practice, for theory is the articulation of practice and good theory [the articulation of] of good practice."<sup>11</sup> What MacIntyre immediately goes on to say is as relevant to the purpose at hand as the sentence just quoted: "Moral debate is not primarily between theories as such, but rather between theories that afford expression to rival forms of practice. And we do not understand any theory adequately until we've understood *in concrete detail* the form of practice of which it's an articulation."<sup>12</sup>

This encompasses, as much as anything else, the articulation of passions, emotions, feelings, and other distinctive phases of our affective lives.<sup>13</sup> No human practice is more bound up with human

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<sup>10</sup> See especially Dewey, "Philosophy and Democracy," Cf. Cornelius Castoriadis, *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy: Essays in Political Philosophy* (NY: Odéon, 1991), Chapter 2 ("The 'End of Philosophy?'," especially 20-24).

<sup>11</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, "The Recovery of Moral Agency?" (The Duddleian Lecture) in *Harvard Divinity Bulletin*, volume 28, number 4 (1999), 8.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*; emphasis added. These rival forms of practice are, at bottom, indicative of rival forms of life. Hardly any culture in our world is monolithic: each encompasses competing forms of life. The manner in which the diversity of cultures within a culture is given its due goes a distance toward defining that culture.

<sup>13</sup> For the way in which the articulation of our passions and emotions is constitutive

passions, often of an intensely visceral character, than those constitutive of the political sphere, especially in a democratic polity.<sup>14</sup> Hence, none is more bound up with the exacting task of articulating in an effective yet nuanced manner the animating passions of democratic citizens. In brief, politics is deeply and inescapably visceral. It concerns emotionally charged issues pertaining to one or more facets of the citizen's identity (facets often quite distinct from and even felt to be opposed to the political aspects). Individuals judge these issues to bear on nothing less than their annihilation in a certain respect, though not for the most part their physical annihilation. Individuals as, say, evangelical Christians judge the state to be mounting or intensifying an assault on them precisely *as Christians*. This is felt to be aimed at not only their political but also their cultural and personal status. That is, it is felt as an existential threat, radiating from the center of an individual's existence to more outward dimensions. Self-defense in the face of annihilative threats, even merely imagined ones, typically assumes a passionate and energetic form.

In general, then, politics is visceral.<sup>15</sup> No passionate participation in the political life of any human association could possibly *be* intelligent if it did not deal squarely with the multitude of passions at play in that life. Without passion, there will almost certainly not be participation.<sup>16</sup> Without intelligence, however,

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of them, see Charles Taylor. The language in which they are articulated and, thus, the settings in which they are shaped demand our attention, if we are to understand them at all and, specifically, if we are to appreciate their decisive role in our political life. See, e.g., *Human Agency and Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) and *The Language Animal: The Full Shape of the Human Linguistic Capacity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016).

<sup>14</sup> The citizens of such a polity possess a deeply felt *right* to express their disapproval and, above all, their outrage.

<sup>15</sup> Dewey tends to use the word *vital*. My use of *visceral* in this context is intended to capture what he means by *vital*. "One of the most marked features of recent culture," Dewey noted in 1942, "has been the perception of the immense role played in human affairs by vital factors, by impulses, desires, active tendencies, to which collectively the name 'unconscious' has been popularly given – however ineptly" ("William James As Empiricist"; LW 15: 16).

<sup>16</sup> It is worth recalling that, in the judgment of Hegel, expressed in his Introduction

participation will even more likely be self-defeating. I will return to this crucial notion of visceral politics. As I hope to make clear when I do, my intention is not to pit visceral politics against heuristic democracy. It is rather to conjoin them or, better, to acknowledge the unseverable conjunction between them. The articulation of our democratic practices encompasses the articulation of our political passions, including our visceral reactions. These passions and reactions drive politics, for ill *and* good. In this and all other regards, Dewey is anything but utopian. We must take humans as we find them. This of course does not mean that we ought to leave them as we find them, that we ought to despair of facilitating self-transformation by transforming the cultural conditions in which the human animal strives to live a luminous life.

To take this as an occasion to point out his failures and shortcomings is utterly misguided. The tasks at hand are too urgent, the stakes too high, the possibilities for amelioration too precious, for bemoaning what he left undone or did badly, all the while doing *nothing* ourselves to carry out the tasks more fully. Indeed, *no* individual thinker is adequate to the comprehensive demands of cooperative intelligence. The best any such thinker can do is identify the most pressing issues, suggest some of the ways in which they are bound together, and address one or more of the issues falling within the scope of that thinker's expertise. And Dewey did this, in a creative and suggestive manner.<sup>17</sup> As often as it has been considered, his multifaceted contribution to social philosophy is still not adequately appreciated. For example, his appreciation of force and power are

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to *The Philosophy of History*, "nothing great has been accomplished in the world *without passion*" (26). He discloses a reservation about the propriety of this term, but then explains that by it he means what occurs "when people place the entire energy of their will and character in these goals, sacrificing something else that might well be a goal, or even something else" (ibid.). The identification of an agent with an endeavor and that of which the endeavor is an instance – e.g., that of an inquirer with the practice of inquiry – is an emotionally charged affair.

<sup>17</sup> Indeed, John J. Stuhr's contribution to this issue of *Dewey Studies* demonstrates in detail just how not only suggestive but also prescient was Dewey when dealing with specific obstacles to American democracy.

rarely given the consideration it deserves.<sup>18</sup> We honor most those *with* whom we think,<sup>19</sup> just as we honor most our historical moment when we candidly confront its constitutive crises (that is, when we think *through* the crises defining our time). It may be, as Hegel claims, that we can only understand an epoch after it has closed. But it may also be that we must attempt to understand a time of transition as it is occurring. Among other things, philosophy, along with journalists, artists, and scientists, can help “to make human beings more aware of what they are doing, and what they’re trying to do, [also] what they’re trying to undo.”<sup>20</sup> What are we, here and now, doing? What’s going on?<sup>21</sup> In the midst of upheavals and transitions, it is ordinarily imperative to make an intelligent effort to grasp the elusive significance of the historical present, knowing in advance this effort will fail. Dewey’s writings illustrate a steadfast effort to grasp revolutionary developments in their deeper import, knowing his understanding of them could never be anything more than selective, fragmentary, and fallible. The alternative to such an effort is to allow oneself to be carried along blindly by forces and developments one has not even bothered identifying for oneself. An imperfect yet nuanced understanding of one’s historical time is, in Dewey’s judgment, preferable to such acquiescence. “Nothing in the world is,” as Martin Luther King, Jr., astutely notes, “more dangerous than sincere ignorance and conscientious stupidity.” Nowhere are such ignorance and such stupidity more likely to be prominent features of social life than during those disconcerting periods of historical upheaval.

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<sup>18</sup> It is significant that many of the best pieces in this regard were written in the context of war. See, e.g., “Force, Violence, and Law” (1916), “Force and Coercion” (1916), and “Intelligence and Power” (1934).

<sup>19</sup> One of my principal models for undertaking this complex task is *Thinking with Whitehead: A Free and Wild Creation* by Isabelle Stengers (Harvard, 2011). Another is virtually everything such Dewey scholars as Stuhr, Larry Hickman, and Richard Eldridge have written on Dewey.

<sup>20</sup> Dewey, “Lessons from the War – Philosophy” in LW 14: 326.

<sup>21</sup> This alludes to the title of a song by Marvin Gaye. The question is critical. Part of Dewey’s wisdom is to realize just how much we do not know and, hence, how much patience is required to reflect carefully while the pressures for immediate action are intense and inescapable. See, e.g., “In a Time of National Hesitation, first printed in *Seven Arts* (1917), 3-7; reprinted in MW 10: 257-59.

Nothing has or could prepare us for such times of crises. Indeed, our intellectual inheritance is, at once, a resource for, and an obstacle to, understanding more adequately what we are doing and trying to do, also undoing or trying to undo.<sup>22</sup> We have here and now to craft an understanding more finely and fully attuned to the tensions, dangers, and opportunities of *this* time than the uncritical deployment of traditional frameworks facilitates. But what are we to make of the spectacle of a thinker who has devoted his life to the task of taking aim at the heart of the present being rendered speechless in the face of events, when arguably his fellow citizens more eagerly sought his insights than ever before? Is this indeed how we are to perceive Dewey's performance at Cooper Union on December 7<sup>th</sup>, 1941? What justifies thinking with a thinker who fell back on a prepared text in the face of national catastrophe? Can one discern a portrait of creative intelligence in so seemingly remote a philosopher?<sup>23</sup>

### Thinking *with* Dewey

No portrait of Dewey, especially regarding war, is, in intent, more damning than the one sketched by John Patrick Diggins as an opening to *The Promise of Pragmatism*. Diggins portrays Dewey in the immediate aftermath of Pearl Harbor as having *nothing* to say to his contemporaries. He uses Dewey's own words to condemn the eighty-two-year-old philosopher: "I have nothing, had nothing, and have nothing now, to say directly about the war."<sup>24</sup> Dewey immediately

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<sup>22</sup> Dewey tended to stress the extent to which this inheritance is an obstacle, rather than a resource, for facilitating such understanding. But he was deeply appreciative of the wings no less than the weight of our inheritance. See, e.g., MW 10:5. Even philosophical systems addressing in their own time artificial problems are beneficial: "The horizon has been widened, ideas of great fecundity struck out, imagination quickened, and a sense of the meaning of things created" (ibid.).

<sup>23</sup> The word is Dewey's own. In "Lessons from the War – in Philosophy," Dewey observes: "My remarks are rather philosophical in nature, on the philosophy side, and philosophy is a somewhat *remote*, and sometimes, I fear, a rather arid subject" (LW 14: 326; emphasis added).

<sup>24</sup> LW 14: 325-26. "After September 1939 and the outbreak of war in Europe, Dewey did not sit quietly, but he wrote," Alan Ryan observes in *John Dewey and High*

adds: “My remarks are rather philosophical in nature, on the philosophy side, and philosophy is a somewhat remote, and sometimes, I fear, a rather arid subject” (326). In fact, Dewey reads his prepared text.<sup>25</sup> In a letter, Bertrand Russell revealed Dewey: “To my surprise I liked him very much. He has a large slow-moving mind, very empirical and candid, with something of the impassivity and impartiality of a natural force.”<sup>26</sup> Nowhere are the impassivity and deliberateness of Dewey’s mind more apparent than on this occasion.<sup>27</sup>

There are other ways of reading Dewey’s *performance* at Cooper Union’s “Great Hall” on December 7<sup>th</sup>, 1941 than the one offered by Diggins. Dewey confesses that he has nothing *directly* to say about the war just declared. He deliberately refuses the role of a seer (LW 14: 326-26).

Even today Dewey is portrayed as naïve and even utopian. Nothing warrants such an unjust characterization of this unblinking meliorist. His meliorism is best seen as a strategy to save such a witness and, of greater moment, the world from despair. It is as though he were saying: “Yes, the world is mad and we are entangled in its madness, but creative intelligence might yet find a foothold for reducing the avoidable suffering due to the reign of conscripted

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*Tide of American Liberalism*, “almost nothing *directly* on the war” (330; emphasis added).

<sup>25</sup> See Ryan, *John Dewey and High Tide of American Liberalism*, 333.

<sup>26</sup> Quoted by Sleeper in his Introduction to LW 14: xx. “I’ve not gotten over,” Dewey confessed upon reading Russell’s *A History of Western Philosophy*, “being sorry that I let R. Russell down so easily as I did. I have never been able to take him seriously enough intellectually to do him justice. If any evidence of the dam [sic.] low estate of philosophy at present were needed, his inflated rep would be enough – he may or may not be an authority on the formalization of mathematics. I’m suspicious about that ... but even so it is pitiful that should give him a rep in philosophy” (quoted by Lewis S. Feuer in his Intro to LW 15: xiin. That is, Sleeper in his Introduction to LW 14 is quoting Feuer in his to LW 15. This regret is conveyed to Boyd H. Bode in a letter dated April 3, 1948.

<sup>27</sup> Diggins does not entertain the possibility that rather than Dewey being overwhelmed by events, rendered in effect speechless by the news of the day, Dewey is refusing to panic in the face of calamity. His calmness might carry the message: we will somehow manage to get through even this.

intelligence.” At every turn, he refused to succumb to the fashions of cultural despair, though he resisted to an even greater extent any impulse to look away from the horrors of the decades through which he lived. As a very young child, he was a witness to the Civil War. Lest there be any illusion, *that* war is still unfolding. A formal surrender hardly ever means anything more than the cessation of armed conflict.<sup>28</sup> As a public intellectual of international stature, Dewey was in his later years a witness to a divided world in which a nuclear arms race was intensifying. There cannot be any illusion here: *that* race is still afoot.

Dewey observed a dilemma deeply inscribed in the attitude of his contemporaries. For many, significant change was impossible, especially change envisioned and overseen by public institutions. For many others, recourse to violence provided the *only* means for such change. He doubted the efficacy of violent revolution, but also the impotency of concerted action. He however never questioned the need to deploy force. As he wryly notes, “since one cannot even walk down the street without using force, the only question which persons can discuss with one another concerns the effective use of force in gaining ends in specific situations” (MW 10: 213). In a different essay, he uses the terms *power* or *energy*, noting that “either is a neutral or a eulogistic term” (MW 10:247). As a neutral term, *power*, *energy*, or presumably *force* simply means “effective means of operation; ability or capacity to execute, to realize ends” (ibid.). As a eulogistic one, each might be taken to designate “the sum total of conditions available for bringing the desirable end into existence” (ibid.).

Our reliance on force (or power) in our efforts to realize ends-in-view is ineliminable. There is a certain wavering in Dewey’s recognition of *intelligence* as itself a force or power. In the same paragraph, he suggests, on the one hand, intelligence “becomes a power only when it is brought into the operation of other forces than itself” but, on the other, concedes, “[p]ersuasion and conference are also powers” (LW 9: 109). It is easy for those who earn their living by words to overestimate the power of words to persuade people, just as

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<sup>28</sup> See “The Dangerous Myth of Appomattox” by Gregory P. Downs in *The NY Times*, Sunday Review (April 11, 2015).

it is easy for those who make their livelihood otherwise to underestimate or even deny the efficacy of words and other symbols. While Dewey appreciated the ubiquity of power or force (there is no place outside of its operation), he was quick to point out: “we have not said anything so long as we have merely said power. What first is needed is discrimination, knowledge of the distribution of power” – and, I would add in for clarity, the diverse forms of power. Power is not only variously and, for the most part, unequally distributed. It is also irreducibly plural in its forms (e.g., the power of a charismatic personality is not to be slighted, while that of the subtler modes of economic coercion is impossible to exaggerate). Overt reliance on force is often denounced as violence, even when it is the justifiable use of necessary force in self-defense, while customary exercises of violence often go unnoticed. Indeed, those who are most ready to denounce violence are, in Dewey’s judgment, those most blind their tacit advocacy of the violent measures by which certain institutions maintain themselves (see, e.g., MW 14, 115-116).

“And it is,” Dewey insists, “no exaggeration to say that the measure of civilization is the degree to which the method of cooperative intelligence replaces the method of brute conflict” (LW 11: 57). But brute conflict entails conscripted intelligence<sup>29</sup> no less than cooperative intelligence deploys *forceful* exertion. That is, brute conflicts are rarely, if ever, simply brute; and the very exercise of such intelligence is an instance of force. While our purportedly brute conflicts can be made less wasteful, the actual exercise of cooperative intelligence can never be anything but an exercise of force. Intelligence is as ineliminable in conflict as force is integral to intelligence. While conflict almost always involves cunning, intelligence always leans on the deployment of force, if only that of fingers striking a keyboard or organs used to make sounds, to utter words.

What Bruno Latour proposes in *Politics of Nature* and indeed elsewhere might profitably be recalled here. Who is exercising force? Against whom it is it being exercised? In the name of what is force

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<sup>29</sup> Cooperative intelligence often takes the form of conscripted intelligence. Think here of the Manhattan Project.

being exerted?<sup>30</sup> And, of greatest importance, at what cost, especially, what is being wasted or destroyed as a result of this specific deployment of force? Some of the stakeholders in our conflicts are absent from both the deliberations regarding how these conflicts are to be addressed and the attempts to reach a formal settlement after physical conflict has exhausted one or both sides. Of course, Latour's questions are familiar to any member of this Society, for they *are* after all Dewey's questions. Whether intelligence can bear the weight Dewey places upon it – whether it can realize the range of purposes for which it was crafted (above all, a significant reduction in coercive forms of conjoint activity) – is, for me at least, an open question. This much is indisputable: we do *not* know as well as we so urgently need to know the meaning of our own exertions and enterprises, our traditions and institutions. The ever more sophisticated forms of warfare are indicative of the power of experimental intelligence, while the ever greater reliance on these weapons is indicative of the artificial limits we have placed on creative intelligence. When Dewey on December 7<sup>th</sup>, 1941, stood before the audience at Cooper Union and reflected on *how* we might probe the meaning of our own activity, he was exemplifying *the lesson yet to be learned*, the form of democracy yet to be appreciated. In a time of crisis, with obvious exceptions, nothing is more requisite but also nothing more unlikely than a protracted moment of *deliberate hesitancy*. The courage to make up one's mind is depicted as cowardice, such hesitancy often seen as nothing short of treason. Dewey however so intimately links the democratic life with creative intelligence that, in a time of crisis, he praises the courage to be tentative and circumspect, to resist the temptation to be "decisive" without having been reflective.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Bruno Latour, *Politics of Nature: How to Bring Science into Democracy*, translated by Catherine Porter (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004)

<sup>31</sup> This is nowhere more manifest than in "In a Time of National Hesitation" (*MW* 10, 256-59).

### Thinking *through* our Time

As the titles of so many of Dewey's writings (most notably, *Democracy and Education*, *Experience and Nature*, *Liberalism and Social Actions*, *Culture and Freedom*, *Experience and Education*) intimate, the title of my reflections on this occasion – "Visceral Politics and Heuristic Democracy" – is one in which the sign of conjunction is as important as the terms conjoined. It is decidedly no part of my intention to pit visceral politics against heuristic democracy. All politics is visceral. This is true of democratic politics in its Deweyan sense no less than theocratic authoritarianism. In turn, all visceral reactions are, at the very least, potentially illuminating symptoms about the body politic. Put more simply, all visceral responses possess heuristic significance. They indicate lines of inquiry. Indeed, they are among the most fruitful sites of public interrogation. But what makes them such fruitful sites also renders them extremely fraught occasions for effective inquiry.

I was reminded of this very recently by Louis Menand's piece in *The New Yorker* on the 1968 election.<sup>32</sup> He relates an incident in which this is manifest. He and his father are listening on their television in the basement of their home to a speech by President Lyndon Johnson (as it turns out, it is the speech in which Johnson announces that he will not run for a second term). As Menand depicts the scene, his father "was standing with his back to the television, so that he would not have to look at Johnson. He was protesting Johnson's policy on Vietnam. The only person present in the basement to appreciate the symbolism was me."<sup>33</sup> When LBJ made his announcement, Menand's father shouted to his wife, who was upstairs because she refused even to listen to Johnson: "He's not running! He's not running!" Neither his mother nor father could bear the sight of Johnson (in his mother's case, she could not bear even the sound of LBJ's voice), *such was their disgust* at his policy in Vietnam. The family

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<sup>32</sup> "Been There: The Presidential election of 1968," *New Yorker* (January 8<sup>th</sup>, 2018). It is striking that Jennifer Hansen in her contribution to this issue of *Dewey Studies* cites a work by this same author in the same publication, albeit a different article.

<sup>33</sup> Menand, "Been There," 69.

was in MA rather than DC because Menand's father had quit his job working for one of Johnson's anti-poverty programs. The depth of this individual's sense of betrayal would be difficult, if not impossible, to measure.

The unquestioned confidence we have in our visceral reactions is, in effect, a dangerous form of moral intuitionism. For these reactions are taken as self-certifying or self-warranting (in effect, one is asserting, "I am outraged by this and, thus, the object of my outrage, given the intensity, sincerity, and force of my feeling, is unquestionably the occasion for this feeling"). But this should not lead us to suppose our visceral reactions are necessarily the principal problem. They may or may not be. Feeling extreme disgust in response to a display of bullying is one thing, feeling this in reaction to two men kissing is another. Either some things *are* disgusting or some things must be identified as such in order to defend a form of life. We need not distract ourselves by engaging in a protracted dispute, or even an abridged one, about moral realism. We might imagine, as Martha Nussbaum does, a politics in which we eradicate the role of disgust, or, as she is hesitant to grant, we might envision a politics in which disgust is taken to be ineradicable yet educable. I can no more imagine the eradication of such a constitutional response as disgust as I can a constitutional need such as hunger.<sup>34</sup> This might of course be an indication of the limits of my imagination. But, then, it might be an indication of the reach of my sense of reality.

In our country, the alleged war against such religions as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam<sup>35</sup> is in truth not a war against these religious traditions but rather a rejection of the absolutistic forms historically assumed and, indeed, contemporaneously championed by many (most?) of their most prominent defenders. The absolutists ought to be concerned that there is afoot a life and death struggle. What James observed in a different context is equally true here: The

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<sup>34</sup> I take the need for food and disgust to be intimately linked. That we so readily or spontaneously find things other than food disgusting is, in my judgment, instructive.

<sup>35</sup> My inclusivity here is highly questionable. For those making the case, the alleged war against religion is, for the most part, a war against one specific religion (Christianity), though it is possible for those alleging this occasionally to marshal support from adherents of other religious traditions.

triumph of pragmatism, as a method, “would mean an enormous change in ... the ‘temperament’ of philosophy” and, indeed, of much else. Specifically, it would mean: “Teachers of the ultra-rationalistic type would be frozen out, much as the courtier is frozen out in republics, as the ultramontane type of priest is frozen out in protestant lands.”<sup>36</sup>

“Our democratic problem ... is,” as James suggests elsewhere, “statable in ultra-simple terms: What are the kind of men [and women] from whom our majorities shall take their cue? Whom shall they treat as their rightful leaders?”<sup>37</sup> Will we remain tolerate of “[v]ulgarity enthroned and institutionalized” or will we rebel in our own name, as “philosopher-citizens,”<sup>38</sup> against that sneering vulgarity and, far more to the point, “conscientious stupidity” are intolerable in our fellow citizens and, hence, our elected representatives?

“By their tone are,” James also contends, “all things human lost or saved. If democracy is to be saved it must catch the higher, healthier tone.”<sup>39</sup> This tone is not that of derision, arrogance, or intolerance. It is just the opposite.

In Deweyan democracy, there would be formal tolerance of the absolutist orientation but a steadfast commitment to religious pluralism. For such pluralism, the motivations animating private citizens are one thing, reasons having public force in a democratic polity are quite another.

War is, on this account, the child of absolutism. Dewey is quite explicit about this:

The claim to possession of first and final truths is, in short, an appeal to final arbitration by force. ... [T]here is no reasonable, practicable way of negotiating their difference. Stark and absolute opposition covers the whole situation. (“Lessons

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<sup>36</sup> James, *Pragmatism*, 31.

<sup>37</sup> *Essays, Comments, and Reviews*, 110.

<sup>38</sup> This expression is borrowed from Cornelius Castoriadis. See, e.g., “Intellectuals and History” in *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy*. We do not need philosopher-kings, but rather philosopher-citizens, those who have the courage to call into question their inheritance while valuing that inheritance. See Dewey, MW 14: 19.

<sup>39</sup> *Op. cit.*, 111.

from the War – in Philosophy”; LW 14: 321-22)

Such opposition can be rendered less than absolute only when absolutism is itself rendered far less than omnipresent. The authoritarian and autocratic character of our formally democratic institutions is the cover under which absolutism insinuates itself, *everywhere*. The human, all too human, quest for an unattainable certainty and clarity must give way to the humble yet hopeful quest for effective solutions to specific problems (e.g., shelter for the homeless, food for the hungry or starving, education for humans of all ages, but especially for the young).

Here is where Dewey seems most utopian but is, in fact, most realistic. What holds out hope for such transformations encompasses the freezing out of certain ideals of character and the lifting up of rival ideals. Radical democracy requires a critical mass of radical experimentalists, as parents, as neighbors, as teachers, as journalists, as artists, as scientists, and in every other imaginable capacity. Please note: it does not require a majority of such experimentalists, only a critical mass of them.<sup>40</sup> The “most urgent problem of education in its deepest and broadest sense” is this: “The formation of the attitudes and dispositions in human beings which take effect in the sort of behavior that is prized and engaged. For habits formed in the long run, through the cumulative combination of consequences[,] the kinds of customs [or practices] and institutions which come to prevail socially” (LW 14: 323). But the formation of such attitudes and dispositions, at least in their interpenetration, constitutes character.<sup>41</sup> An experimentalist

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<sup>40</sup> This appears to be a truism that is actually true: at the time of the revolt of the Colonies against the crown of England, roughly a third of the population was in favor of the revolt, roughly a third against such “treachery,” and the final portion either not strongly committed one way or the other *or* not committed at all. The Soviet Revolution succeeded by an even smaller percent of the population. The potential power of a critical mass of organized individuals should never be underestimated. Given the circumstances, this might be as little as 15% or (in rare circumstances) even less, though ordinarily it is around the percent that carried the day in the American Revolution.

<sup>41</sup> “Character is,” Dewey stresses in *Human Nature and Conduct*, “the interpenetration of habits” (MW 14: 29).

character stands in stark, but *not* absolute, opposition, to an absolutist character. For ingenuous experimentalists can find common ground even here. They certainly do not insist upon anyone giving up the Torah, the New Testament, or the Quran. They only insist that, *in the public sphere*, the appeal to such scripture has, at most, very limited authority. In most contexts, it has no relevance at all for anyone but those who subscribe to the scripture to which appeal is being made. Of course, absolutists will rightly judge this to be an attack on the authority they accord to the sovereignty of God. The only way to counter this is the slow, patient process of exemplifying the ideals of character which can be glimpsed, however partially, in every culture and every epoch, but which only in recent centuries have assumed a far greater stature.

The war against war is a war against absolutism in all of its forms.<sup>42</sup> But this war cannot be a war in the traditional sense, since the means of opposition must be one with the ends animating the endeavor. Regarding war, let Deweyan advocates of radical democracy never deceive themselves about their opponent. But, of equal moment, let them never deceive themselves about the only effective means for freezing out certain traditional ideals. These means include a just appreciation for what these exemplars of character have done to bequeath us with a sense of excellence. Noting their inadequacy for our times does not entail overlooking either their historical significance or (in a qualified sense) their abiding relevance.

We have never been modern because we have never been as experimentalist as our world requires, indeed, as our experimentalism

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<sup>42</sup> In *A Common Faith*, Dewey suggests a cultural development of the most profound implications, one we are just beginning to recognize in its historical significance: "Nothing less than a revolution in the 'seat of intellectual authority' has taken place. This revolution, rather than any particular aspect of its impact upon this and that religion, is the central thing. In this revolution, every defeat is stimulus to renewed inquiry; every victory is the open door to more discoveries; and every new discovery is a new seed planted in the soil of intelligence" (LW 9: 23). The absolutist not only appeals to external authority but defends this authority against any fundamental critique. In contrast, heuristic democracy is predicated on accepting the implications of the revolution to which Dewey is pointing in the passage from *A Common Faith*. The immanent authority of ongoing inquiry is sufficient unto the day.

itself demands. An experimental commitment to radical experimentalism can be absolute, or better, uncompromising without being absolutistic or authoritarian. Indeed, it destroys itself when it allows itself to be made in the image of its opponent. The task before us is to help remake absolutists in the image of *their* opponent – the humble, courageous inquirer willing to modify or even abandon cherished beliefs and traditional frameworks.<sup>43</sup>

New media make this more possible and more difficult.<sup>44</sup> Decentered forms of experimental authority however provide a singular opportunity for radical democracy. At least as much as this, they offer singular dangers. Given recent events and upheavals, they obviously also generate unparalleled dangers. With John Dewey, the only hope lies in going forward, with greater resolve, imagination, and generosity than we have yet marshaled. The tragic irony is that those who wish to go backward (e.g., back to the Founding Fathers or the divine patriarch or one of his prophets) have more effectively seized these media than those who profess a commitment to go forward. The *practical* lesson of Dewey's *The Public and Its Problems* however could not be clearer: the ethos of democracy depends upon seizing the cutting-edge technologies of communication and using them for transforming an inchoate, incipient public into a vibrant, reflexive one. Our failure to do so is, at once, a moral, political, technological, educational, and ecological failure. It is arguably more a failure of intelligence and imagination than one of will or passion.

If the *task before us* remains substantially what it was when Dewey in 1939 at the age of eighty read the talk to which I am alluding here,<sup>45</sup> that's on us, not on him. We need far more today than in 1939

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<sup>43</sup> If religion could be seen, as Santayana suggests, as a form of poetry, and if this would not be taken as a denigration of religion, it would be much easier to square the existential "truths" of sacred scripture and the experiential truths (or warranted assertions) of controlled inquiry. It is far from insignificant that literalism, religious, juridical, and otherwise, is so closely tied to absolutism.

<sup>44</sup> See Jennifer Hansen's contribution to this issue of *Dewey Studies*, also Lance E. Mason's to the inaugural issue in 2017, "The 'Dewey-Lippmann' Debate and the Role of Democratic Communication in the Trump Age." *Dewey Studies*, 1, 1, 79-110.

<sup>45</sup> "Creative Democracy – The Task Before Us" (*LW* 14, 224-30). See Richard J. Bernstein's "John Dewey on Democracy: The Task Before Us" in *Philosophical Profiles*

to link the self-corrective practices of experimental inquiry with the self-governing ideals of our nominal democracy. Above all else, we need to cultivate that ideal of character in which the humility of the experimental inquirer eclipses the knowingness of the scientific expert, or worse, ideologue, also the expansive generosity of civic friendship counteracts deeply visceral reactions to individuals whose choices are so personally, culturally, and environmentally destructive (as self-destructive as anything else). We should not hesitate to denounce certain attitudes as deplorable, but we should also be precise in identifying those whom we are denouncing in this manner. For example, white supremacists *are* deplorable. Dewey certainly did not hesitate in deploring them. To see an equivalence between “Black lives matter” and “White lives are superior”<sup>46</sup> indicates more than “a certain blindness in human beings.” It points to a deplorable prejudice in some nominally democratic citizens. The attitude of the experimentalist however expresses itself most properly in its “sympathies and admirations, not by dislikes and disdains” (James, “The Social Value of the College-Bred”). Especially in this way, its attractiveness as an ideal of character can be most immediately and deeply felt. There is nothing patronizing or haughty in its stance toward either the natural world or other human beings.<sup>47</sup> It is a temperament in which a deep, if flickering consciousness of intimate, sustaining ties to the natural world and to other human beings tempers our most visceral reactions and perhaps even animates our most systematic inquiries.<sup>48</sup> We are

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(Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986), 26-72.

<sup>46</sup> In an interview in *Playboy* (May 1971), John Wayne unapologetically expressed his advocacy of “white supremacy.” See James Baldwin, “Freaks and the American Ideal of Manhood” in *Baldwin: Selected Essays*, edited by Toni Morrison (NY: The Library of America, 1998), 814-29. This also appeared originally in *Playboy* (January 1985).

<sup>47</sup> “Respect for experience is,” Dewey wrote in a late manuscript, “respect for its possibilities in thought and knowledge as well as an enforced attention to its joys and sorrows. Intellectual piety toward experience is a precondition of the direction of life and of generous and tolerant cooperation among men. Respect for the things of experience alone brings with it respect for others, the centres of experience, as is free from patronage, domination and the will to impose” (LW 1: 392).

<sup>48</sup> In a review of *God the Invisible King* (NY: Macmillan, 1917) by H. G. Wells, Dewey wrote in *Seven Arts* (2, 334-39), “Uneasy and tortured egoism, finding not rest for

denizens of the Earth and the offspring of histories too myriad even to identity, before and beyond being citizens of a nation. For most of us, our attachment to our country is neither our primary nor our ultimate attachment, even when it is deeply important. Our civic ties need to be interpreted and assessed, time and again, in light of these more extensive and intimate ties, natural and historical. This hardly

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itself in itself, creates a huge Ego [God the invisible king] which, although finite and although not a creator of worlds, is still huge enough to be our King, Leader and Helper" (MW 10: 314). The "projection" of such a Divine Ego to shore up the sense of anxiety and inadequacy of the human ego (the word "projection" here is Dewey's own) is not only fantastic but also ineffective. The sole path to moral maturity is the cultivation of humility, the acceptance of our finitude. While Wells prompted Dewey to think of "the psychological mechanism ... of 'projection,'" he ultimately was led to recall humility: "And then I thought," he notes in closing, "of the humbleminded in all ages and places who live in a sense of the infinite ties, a few perceived but most of them obscure, which them to their fellows, to the soil, to the air and to the light of day, and whose strength to suffer and to enjoy is renewed daily by contact and by intercourse" (MW 10: 314). But what does this have to do with our topic? To continue quoting from the concluding paragraph of this review to its last word: "I then seemed better able to understand both that egoism which brings war into the world, and that egoism which revels in the masking a balked egoism by setting it in a journalistic declaration of the God of the modern mind. In the light of the world's catastrophes perhaps such is the religious creed of contemporary man" (ibid.). But it is patently a self-destructive creed, moreover, an ecologically disastrous faith. The common faith of the humble naturalist stands in marked contrast to the arrogant faith of the egoistic nationalist (or is it naturalistic egoist?). John J. Stuhr's contribution to this issue of *Dewey Studies* offers an astute diagnosis of this social pathology (the pathology of such nationalism). "Only an illusion of conceit [or egoism]," Dewey observes in *Human Nature and Conduct* (1922) persuades us that cosmic difference hangs upon even our wisest and most strenuous effort. ... In a genuine sense every act is already possessed of infinite import. The little part of the scheme of affairs which is modifiable by our efforts is continuous with the rest of the world. The boundaries of our garden plot join it to the world of our neighbors and neighbors' neighbors. That small effort which we can put forth is in turn connected with an infinity of events that sustain and support us. The consciousness of this encompassing infinity of connections is ideal" (MW 14: 180). It nonetheless can be efficacious. It is especially pertinent to quote the concluding sentences of this pivotal text: "The life of the community in and through which we live and have our being is the fit symbol of this relationship" to nature in its entirety. The acts in which it expresses our perception of the ties which bind us to others are its only rites and ceremonies" (MW 14: 227). See also *Experience and Nature* (1925) and *A Common Faith* (1934).

means advocacy of a facile cosmopolitanism. But it minimally means embrace of a demanding globalism.<sup>49</sup> For such an embrace, our loyalty to our country is critical, in a twofold sense. It is *critical* in the sense of being vital or indispensable, but also in that of being intelligently and hence “critically” enacted.<sup>50</sup> But the ideals of liberty, equality, and solidarity not only justify this loyalty. They also require us to contest any tendency to sacralize the nation, to grant even the elected representatives of the national state the unquestionable sovereignty of an unaccountable bully.<sup>51</sup>

This sense of our connectedness can be far more than ethereal and emotional, though it is inherently vague and affective. It can nonetheless be the animating principle of a fighting faith,<sup>52</sup> a faith that does not meekly accept the renting of these ties (e.g., the pollution of air and water, the destruction of neighborhoods and wilderness). A felt sense of the infinite yet intimate ties binding us to soil and sun, the Earth and the stars, the atmosphere and the oceans, the gentle and even the “harsh north wind” (James) does not dispose us to quietism or passivity. Such a consciousness prompts us to be solicitous and nurturing, attentive to destructive fissures and protective of

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<sup>49</sup> Whereas the *polis* in cosmopolitanism has only a very vague and ephemeral referent, the *globe* in globalism, in referring to the Earth, has a concrete and specific one.

<sup>50</sup> In his essay “On the Duty of Civil Disobedience,” in *Walden and Civil Disobedience* (NY: New American Library, 1980), Henry David Thoreau observes: “The mass of men serve the State thus, not as men mainly, but as machines with their body. ... Others ... serve the State chiefly with their heads; and, as they rarely make any moral distinctions, they are as likely to serve the devil, without intending it, as God. A very few, as heroes, patriots, martyrs, reformers in the good sense, and *men*, serve the State with their consciences also, and so necessarily resist it for the most part; and they are commonly treated by it as enemies” (224)

<sup>51</sup> John E. Smith, *Quasi-Religions* (NY: St. Martin’s Press, 1995).

<sup>52</sup> In “The Social-Value of the College Bred,” in *Essays, Comments, and Reviews*, James writes, on the one hand, we fully recognize the possibility that “democracy as a whole may undergo self-poisoning. But, on the other hand, democracy is a kind of religion, and are bound not to admit its failure [that is, to fight against its defeat]. Faiths and utopias are the noblest exercise of human reason, and no one with a spark of reason in him will sit down fatalistically before the croaker’s picture” (109). Rather we will fight for the success of democracy, even against what often appears to be hopeless odds. For some of us at least, American democracy is a *fighting* faith.

vulnerable beings. While all life is precarious, some stages and beings are more precariously situated than others. “The acts in which we express our perception of the ties which bind us to others are,” Dewey suggests, “its only rites and ceremonies” (MW 14: 227). These acts can take as many forms as these ties themselves can assume, not least of all acts of protest, resistance, and opposition.

If the community provides the most apt symbol of these infinite ties,<sup>53</sup> the care for, and enhancement of, those ties, becomes the “rites” by which the members of the community affirm, nurture, and strengthen this nexus of relationships. The failings of political representatives bear directly upon this enveloping nexus of relationships. Serious interrogations from the press and elsewhere will be greeted with threats, derision, and insults by these leaders. Reasonable appeals from national allies and alliances are judged by these representatives to be of no account, even though at least a critical mass of engaged citizens judge otherwise. The state is presumed by these representatives to be accountable only to itself, the authority of the executive to be beyond question, while many of those being “represented” contend that such a unilateral stance is essentially a bellicose posture.

A sense of connectedness to more than the nation can and ought to animate and focus opposition to nationalistic egoism when it operates in such an irresponsible manner.<sup>54</sup> When John Dewey heard the visceral politics of “America First!” he interpreted the cry contextually and, hence, historically.<sup>55</sup> He did not take it to be a

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<sup>53</sup> In addition to those already cited, there are important formulations in *A Common Faith* of this fundamental thesis. See especially LW 9, 56-58.

<sup>54</sup> The contributions of John Stuhr and Jennifer Hansen have considered this aspect of the question to a far greater extent than I have. As mentioned in another footnote, my paper was conceived, written, and expanded in light of theirs. In this respect, it is deliberately complementary.

<sup>55</sup> While I will focus on a passage from the Introduction to the Second Edition of *German Philosophy and Politics*, another demands to be recalled here. “So I close by saying,” Dewey wrote in “The Basic Values and Loyalties of Democracy,” originally published in *American Teacher* (May 1941), “that the third loyalty which measures democracy [after loyalty to liberty and equality] is the will to transform passive toleration into active cooperation. The ‘fraternity’ which was the third member of the democratic trinity of the France of the Revolution has never been practiced on

justifiable or even intelligent (or minimally reasonable) affirmation of the legitimate demands of a sovereign nation. He rather heard the cry as overweening nationalism greatly contributing to international instability, thus, to the instability of the nation from which the cry is emanating. After recalling the concluding sentences of his own *German Philosophy and Politics* (1915) – “the situation which then [in 1915] existed ‘presents the spectacle of the breakdown of the whole philosophy of Nationalism, political racial and cultural,’” Dewey in “The One-World of Hitler’s National Socialism” (1942)<sup>56</sup> is quick to point out these sentences also suggested that

our own country is not free from the guilt of swollen nationalism. Without reviving here the question of ‘isolationism’ versus ‘interventionism’ which events have decided, it is fitting to note that the isolationist plea for ‘America First,’ and the reasons it put forth in behalf of that plea, was animated by an uncurbed nationalist spirit of the sort which has brought the world to its present tragic state. The ever-increasing interdependence of peoples in every phase of modern life does not automatically bring understanding, amity and cooperation of the interdependent elements. As the state of the world proves, it may produce tensions and frictions, and these may lead each element to try at once to withdraw into itself and to establish peace and unity by forceful conquest of opposing elements. (LW 8: 445)<sup>57</sup>

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a wide scale. Nationalism, expressed in our country in such phrases as ‘America First,’ is one of the strongest factors in producing existing totalitarianism, just as a promise of doing away with it has caused some misguided persons to be sympathetic with Naziism. Fraternity is the will to work together; it is the essence of cooperation. As I have said, it has never been widely practiced, and this failure is a large factor in producing the present state of the world. We may hope that it, not the equality produced by totalitarian suppression, will constitute the ‘wave of the future” (LW 8: 277).

<sup>56</sup> This first appeared as the Introduction to the Second Edition of *German Philosophy and Politics* (NY: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1942).

<sup>57</sup> Subsequent events have only decided even more emphatically in favor of the international side. This of course does not mean that citizens or their representatives will acknowledge what historical events have made patently clear – international

To try to insure the safety of the nation by engaging in indefinite wars with a number of other countries does very little to accomplish its goals. Democratic sovereignty is sacrificed on the altar of national "sovereignty." Not only is the nation pitted violently and, hence, stupidly against other nations, the protracted struggle to protect national sovereignty in this fanatical manner pits the citizens of the nation against one another in what reveals itself to be nothing less than a war of some against others. The mythical war of all against all distracts attention from the actual war, within the nation, of some locked in war against others.

What Dewey wrote in 1942 is arguably even truer today. "As yet we have no adequately developed American philosophy, because," he stresses, "we have not as yet made articulate the methods and aims of the democratic way of life" (LW 8: 444). The articulation of these method and aims, however, must be interwoven with that of the passions and emotions by which over most encompassing and radical attachments or connections are expressed. Visceral politics need not be a celebration of stupidity, much less a riot of intolerance. While the intelligent articulation of our angers, frustrations, fears, anxieties, outrage, and much else cannot help but to transform them, they will always be the animating force of our political life and, indeed, every other form of human life. One should never imagine that "the emotional, passionate phase of action can or should be eliminated," especially "in behalf of a bloodless reason" (MW 14:136). Dewey could not be clearer about the way forward: "More 'passions,' not fewer, is the answer" (ibid.). His examples are instructive. "To check the influence of hate there must be sympathy."

For eliciting, widening, and deepening one's sympathy toward others, however, the arts are almost always needed. In order to render sympathy itself nuanced, situational, and respectful to those to whom it is directed, "there are needed emotions of curiosity, caution, and respect for the freedom of others" (ibid.). In the nuanced, flexible, and integrated<sup>58</sup> habits of experimental practitioners, human intelligence

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interdependencies of the most far-reaching and deep-cutting character.

<sup>58</sup> Such integration can of course never be final or complete. But rigid

most clearly reveals itself.<sup>59</sup> For in the character of these experimentalists and the culture (or ethos) advanced by their actions, interventions, and indeed protests, such intelligence shows itself to be a working harmony of mutually supportive and intensifying passions.<sup>60</sup>

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compartmentalization tends to be symptomatic of pathology. For example, the inability to see the humanity of one's enemy's children – the rigid compartmentalizing of human sympathy – is more than a moral limitation or even blindness. It is an instance of moral distortion and disfigurement.

<sup>59</sup> The interplay between sympathy and curiosity is especially relevant to the difficult challenges posed by our visceral politics. As Dewey suggests in the passage being quoted, curiosity helps to work against sympathy becoming maudlin, sentimental, and worse (manipulative, patronizing, and denigrating), while sympathy works against curiosity becoming unhinged from due care for sentient life other than human life, also for other cultures of a markedly different character from our own. As we witness in Donald Trump, a lack of curiosity can be as damaging as a lack of sympathy. David Brooks and others have indeed pointed out this lack of interest in others and in the world to be possibly his most incapacitating quality: little does more to render him unfit to rule a democracy than this lack.

<sup>60</sup> This invites comparison to George Santayana's characterization of reason as an harmony of impulses or desires. While Dewey could be sharply critical of Santayana, he was also deeply appreciative of his writings, especially *The Life of Reason*. See, e.g., Dewey *MW* 3, 319-22.