

# EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

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This issue of *Dewey Studies* is pleased to present four articles, two book reviews, and an interview. The articles, which have been anonymously peer reviewed, were submitted independently ‘over the transom’ yet they display a certain unity of focus on Dewey’s process philosophy and its implications.

Jim Garrison, in “Creative Democracy as the Aesthetic Solution to Nihilism,” notes that Dewey’s post-Darwinian philosophy completely rejects the metaphysics of substance - the image of individual subjectivity seeking to penetrate an independent and external ‘reality’ and to express truths about that reality in language. Dewey’s philosophy, in contrast to classical metaphysics, as well “forswears inquiry after absolute origins and absolute finalities.” Instead, it takes its starting points for inquiry in the troubled situations of present moments, as individuals are impeded in attaining immediate ends.

To move forward individuals need to reorder factors in the situation. If they are not pursuing “absolute ends,” however, how are they to guide their lives? This question has been at the forefront since Nietzsche declared that “God is dead.” He proposed that agents must take upon themselves the creative capacities previously assigned to their Gods. Related responses to the spectre of nihilism include Foucault’s Baudelarian-inspired dandy and Rorty’s ironist.

Garrison finds all of these post-nihilistic stances rooted in conceptions of the individual self that remain entangled in classical metaphysics and are also incompatible with democratic self-governance. They all, in different ways, blink the evident fact that humans develop their individual selves not in isolated acts of self-fashioning, but through the process of engaging with others in reconstructing community life. This necessitates communication with others., which forces them to listen to and take on board the experience of others. When they speak, they must formulate speech utterances not only intelligible to others but sufficiently persuasive as

to generate cooperation in common pursuits. In this process both speakers and listeners change.

Lawrence Heglar, in “Dewey’s Treatment of Language as Action,” further clarifies the way in which Dewey’s philosophy of language moves beyond metaphysical notions. Inquiry seeks to re-order situations to unblock action. Language, whether in solitary or collective inquiry, is a necessary tool in establishing order. Its job is not to refer to some external reality, but to serve as a tool in ordering situational elements immediately at hand.

Scott R. Stroud, in “*Dissoi Logoi*, Rhetoric, and Moral Education: From the Sophists to in Dewey’s Pragmatism,” investigates the rhetorical notion of *Dissoi Logoi*, or taking up both sides of an argument to come up with a deeper truth. Drawing on the work of Edward Schippa, Stroud notes that the notion can be interpreted in two ways. A *subjective* interpretation notes that there must be two sides to an issue in order for anything genuinely to be *at issue*. It focuses on the subject’s ability to take up arguments for both sides. Stroud notes resonances of this interpretation with the pedagogical device of switch-side debate, where participants have to argue for either side, or both sides, of some proposition, providing necessary training for spontaneous argumentation and debate competitions.

John Stuart Mill has offered a profound and much-quoted defense of *dissoi logoi* in this sense:

He who knows only his own side of the case, knows little of that. His reasons may be good, and no one may have been able to refute them. But if he is equally unable to refute the reasons on the opposite side; if he does not so much as know what they are, he has no ground for preferring either opinion. Nor is it enough that he should hear the arguments of adversaries from his own teachers... That is not the way to

do justice to the arguments, or bring them into real contact with his own mind. He must be able to hear them from persons who actually believe them; who defend them in earnest, and do their very utmost for them. He must know them in their most plausible and persuasive form; he must feel the whole force of the difficulty which the true view of the subject has to encounter and dispose of; else he will never really possess himself of the portion of truth which meets and removes that difficulty.<sup>1</sup>

Stroud notes that an alternate, *objective* account of *Dissoi Logoi* points toward a process metaphysics akin to Dewey's. On this interpretation, the rhetor is not merely instructed to take up both fixed sides of an argument, but also to see that 'reality' is not neatly divided into true and false, but is in constant flux. True and false are inseparable, and like yin and yang, attract and complement and even turn into their opposites. *Dissoi logoi*, like Dewey's process philosophy, thus prepares us to live in a world of constant change and uncertainty.

Finally, Mark Jackson, in "Pragmatism and Economic Doctrine," offers a critique of the standard approach to economic science. Classical and neoclassical economics alike locate axioms based on a fixed, *a priori* conception of human nature - "economic man." They then derive theorems about economic behavior and extend their economic analyses into other spheres of life including the family and the polity.

This entire project, Jackson shows, becomes suspect when confronted with a process philosophy. Jackson lays out a view of human behavior derived from Dewey, in which habit as a motivating

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<sup>1</sup> Mill, *On Liberty*, Gutenberg Project [EBook #34901], p. 67.  
<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/34901/34901-h/34901-h.htm>

force in behavior is shaped in interaction with ever-changing institutional norms, which are in turn strained and changed as a result of action. Economic action takes place in an arena - as already described by Garrison, Heglar and Stroud - of shifting laws, shifting market norms, and ever-changing actors. As the Arab says in William Saroyan's *The Time of Your Life*, "No foundation. All the way down the line."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Saroyan, *The Time of Your Life*.

[https://archive.org/stream/SaroyanW.TheTimeOfYourLife.APlay./Saroyan%20W.%20The%20Time%20of%20Your%20Life.%20A%20Play.\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/SaroyanW.TheTimeOfYourLife.APlay./Saroyan%20W.%20The%20Time%20of%20Your%20Life.%20A%20Play._djvu.txt)

## ***Dewey Studies - Call for Papers***

### **Special Issue: “After the Insurrection: Addressing the Crisis in Liberal Democracy.”**

Edited by Leonard Waks, Hangzhou Normal University; Liz Jackson, Education University of Hong Kong; and Sophie Ward, University of Durham.

Scheduled for publication in December 2021.

### **The Crisis in Democracy**

According to “Democracy Under Siege,” the 2020 Annual Report of the non-profit organization Freedom House:

*As a lethal pandemic, economic and physical insecurity, and violent conflict ravaged the world in 2020, democracy’s defenders sustained heavy new losses in their struggle against authoritarian foes, shifting the international balance in favor of tyranny.*

*Incumbent leaders increasingly used force to crush opponents and settle scores, sometimes in the name of public health, while beleaguered activists—lacking effective international support—faced heavy jail sentences, torture, or murder in many settings.*

The democratic decline is now felt alike by citizens of the cruelest dictatorships and long-standing democracies. Democratic freedom is diminishing in China, Russia, India, and Eastern Europe. Meanwhile far right parties make progress in Germany and France, while democratic institutions erode in the United States and the United Kingdom.

Lying behind the crisis is the impasse in the neo-liberal world order and economic globalization. As globalization has entailed the shift of manufacturing and other industries to nations with lower

labor costs, workers in de-industrializing countries have lost both income and social status. Meanwhile the flow of immigrants has challenged cultural norms and hierarchies, leaving the national groups feeling threatened and displaced.

In the United States, the 2016 election campaign of Donald Trump appealed to de-industrialized workers, the “losers” of globalization, and to those—mostly older white males—nursing cultural grievances as ethnic minorities and immigrants gained cultural and political power. In January 2021 an insurrectionist mob, provoked by Trump, stormed the capitol and disrupted the certification of his opponent’s election. Leading up to the insurrection the Trump administration removed mechanisms of accountability, spread false claims of electoral fraud, and responded to protests against racial injustice with irregular federal police violence.

In the United Kingdom, Prime Minister Boris Johnson completed the “Brexit” withdrawal from the European Union. Brexit won narrow popular support on the basis of similar false claims regarding its economic benefits and appeals to racial and cultural grievances. The withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the EU weakens the pro-democracy European project, which has been further weakened by the rise of the far right in other member countries.

In Asia, the Covid-19 pandemic has cast political and socioeconomic inequities and lack of representation within societies in a new light. China’s pandemic response has spurred critical questions about its mechanisms for democratic accountability and global information sharing, while its treatment of regional groups reached crisis points in Xinjiang and Hong Kong. In Philippines, India, and Thailand, challenges with human rights have been intensified and exacerbated with tragic results alongside the rise of Covid-19.

### **The Special Issue**

To respond to these developments, the editors of *Dewey Studies* invite contributions to a special issue, “After the Insurrection: Addressing the Crisis in Liberal Democracy.” We seek short papers of up to 1500 words, in response to such questions as these:

- How can philosophers, humanities and social science scholars, and educators at all levels respond to the crisis in liberal democracy?
- What new theoretical frameworks or empirical research studies might clarify the crisis and point to avenues for its resolution?
- How can the crisis of democracy be addressed through the standard formats of academic activity such as papers in scholarly conferences, publications in scholarly journals, and the introduction of new courses or curriculum content?
- What new forms of scholarly activity and publication can be initiated to reach new audiences with new forms of communication?
- What kinds of collaborative projects, in research or teaching, within and beyond academia, might address the crisis?
- How can academic professionals join forces with pro-democracy activists and contribute to their efforts?

We especially seek brief, informal contributions offering new insights. While reference citations are expected, the editors welcome original and provocative ideas regardless of scholarly embellishments. We also welcome reviews of recent books addressing the crisis and bibliographies of recent scholarship on any of its dimensions.

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Submissions are due by August 1, 2021. Authors will be notified by September 15, 2021 and final drafts will be due on November 1. For further information, please contact Leonard Waks at:

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