

CO-EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

SECTION ONE: POLITICS AND CIVIL SOCIETY

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Liberal Democracy - Part of the Problem?

While we might expect our contributors to discuss the insurrection and address ways to stamp out far-right insurrectionists, our authors take quite different paths. Some start by insisting that our entrenched institutions of liberal representative democracy may themselves contribute to the crisis. Our problem, they suggest, is not, at first instance, *saving* liberal democracy but *interrogating* it to discover needed modifications or supplements - to create a more robust form of democracy.

Roberto Frega strikes this keynote in “The Solution to the Ills of Democracy is More Democracy.” He states that while there is much talk about the crisis in liberal democracy, “the idea that the greatest threat contemporary societies are facing is the crisis of liberal democracy is at the same time accurate and misguided.” It is accurate because individual rights are under attack. It is misguided because it “tacitly reduces the democratic project to its..liberal

variant.” This reduction obscures other possible forms of democracy- some of which were actively discussed before the collapse of European socialism and the broad imposition of the neoliberal order. While democracy presupposes individual freedom, Frega notes, it also requires equality and solidarity. Economic neoliberalism has exacerbated gross inequality and undermined the conditions for solidarity. We must therefore move towards economic democracy by confronting undemocratic managerial structures and assuring decision-making rights for workers.

Economic globalization clearly has winners and losers. In “The Problem Is Us,” Shannon Sullivan notes that the winners - often the quickest to defend liberal representative institutions - are highly educated, largely white, cosmopolitan ‘Anywheres’ - people like ‘us’ - while the losers are less educated ‘Somewheres’ with limited mobility. The wages for the winners include enhanced social respect and esteem: “Globalization puts the class of educated, technocratic, cognitively elite people at the top of the hierarchy of esteem.” The crisis results from populist efforts by the losers to blow up that hierarchy. For Sullivan,

the best response is to join the effort to undermine the hierarchy of esteem through policies that benefit the “Somewheres’ - e.g., diverting government funds from universities to technical schools and providing reparations for Black and indigenous workers.

Economic democracy is also central in Kris Millett’s “Fascism and the Enduring Problem of the Liberal Individual in Polanyi.” Millett notes parallels between European fascism and today’s populism, and turns to Karl Polanyi’s diagnosis of fascism as a crisis of the liberal individualist subject; today’s atomized individuals have lost the ability to compose and take charge of their personal and communal lives. Polanyi offers a ‘thick’ individualism in place of the fragmented, atomistic individualism of classical liberalism. Individuality, as he sees it, is the capacity to accept personal and moral responsibility and to sustain community. Polanyi, anticipating Frega, sees this as requiring extension of democracy beyond liberal representative political institutions to include individual rights in the economic sphere.

While we can learn important lessons from past thought-leaders, we also have to critique those who have contributed to our current crisis, and chief among these as promoting market fundamentalism is Friedrich Hayek (whose ideas were influenced by socialist Karl Polanyi's younger brother, liberal Michael Polanyi). Robert Vinten, in "Hayek, Scepticism, and Democracy: A Wittgensteinian Critique," argues that Hayek's atomistic psychology led him into the trap Wittgenstein diagnoses in his discussion of private languages. Hayek believed that individual perceptions were private in the sense that they could not adequately be disclosed to others. On this basis, Vinten suggests, Hayek thought that individual preferences could not be disclosed to a central planning bureau, and thus that central planning would inevitably be epistemically flawed; only markets could accommodate individual preferences. Vinten notes that the image of a unitary, isolated 'central planner' is a myth. Planners coordinate with others closer to the field of action. "Planning is not a matter of an individual planning out every last detail of how an economy is to be run." In a socialist society workers gain economic

knowledge in their workplaces and localities and contra Hayek can make that knowledge available to their unions and planning boards; there is no *a priori* epistemological barrier preventing central planners from knowing, at the appropriate level of specificity, what individual actors know and want.

While all of the above authors are *for* democracy, the contemporary priority for all is to modify or extend it to address the social and economic problems of those left behind. By contrast, for Guoping Zhao, in “On the Threat to Liberal Democracy,” the defence of liberal democracy against authoritarian populist incursions is the pressing challenge. She worries that left-populist social and economic narratives pitting winners against losers - elites against the people - are tacit invitations for authoritarian responses. She is *for* the protection of the poor and oppressed. She grants that the liberal account of the individual subject needs thickening (perhaps along lines similar to one or both Polanyi’s) to unleash the potentialities and recognize the inherent relatedness of individuals. Individuals must find means to connect, but Zhao insists

these connections should be as individuals, not as members of oppositional groups.

Cultural Democracy

In “Irrationalism, Liberal Democracies, and Individual Freedom,” Donatello Aramini extends the analysis from the social and economic to the cultural sphere, in his discussion of George L. Mosse, the great historian of European fascism.⁷⁴ If, for Polanyi, fascism arises from the failure of liberal democracy and market capitalism to provide spaces for responsible individual and communal action, for Mosse the problem lies in their failure to provide channels for expression of deeper, unconscious drives. Populism, unlike liberalism, offers a rich menu of myths, symbols, and liturgies, but these swallow up individuality in irrational mass solidarity. What can democracy offer in its place to channel these dark forces in human nature?

⁷⁴ This contribution has personal meaning for me, as Mosse was my greatly beloved teacher of European history at the University of Wisconsin.

Mosse agrees with Frega that any cohesive society needs solidarity. He calls for a 'new politics' based on mass participation - a kind of democratic theater - balanced with critical education in support of humane nationalism as an alternative to populist ethno-nationalism. While Frega and Polanyi call for economic democracy, Moose appears to opt for participatory *cultural* democracy.

Confucian Democracy

Also along cultural lines, several authors take up the idea of a distinct form of democracy for the Confucian culture area. Sor-hoon Tan states that democracy for this area should not be "the form of *de facto* American liberal democracy," but rather one suited to Confucian communitarian values. She notes the glaring difference in American and Asian citizen responses to COVID: many individuals in liberal, rights-centered political societies disregarded the responsibility of care for others in a zealous defense of their individual liberties, while in Confucian societies "the virtue of humaneness (*ren*) disposes a person to respect and care for

one's immediate kin as well as fellow citizens." A democracy for this region must respect its distinct values.

Confucius, Tan notes, stated that without trust, the people will not stand together with the government (*Analects* 12.7). She suggests (anticipating Serrano-Zamora and other 'democratic experimentalists' below) that for governments to attain trust today they must also enlist citizens in public inquiry, "putting at their disposal the tools of inquiry (from timely information to open fora for discussion) that will enable them to learn as well as contribute."

Stephen Chatelier recounts his first visit to China, where endless construction sites were surrounded by walls plastered with socialist slogans - like "Freedom and Democracy." He found these slogans jarring until, with Soja and Said, he understood that "there is no absolute, pure, or fixed notion of democracy," that as our conceptions travel, as they "encounter new spaces of cultural politics" they "take on new shape and new meaning." Chatelier considers "socialism with Chinese characteristics" to have new meaning - not as an imminent vision but as an ideological

guardian against a slide into a toxic form of individualist capitalism. Thus, instead of emphasizing the “crashing waves of illiberalism weakening democracy’s very foundations,” Chatelier invites us to consider the crisis in democracy as resulting from the imposition of neoliberalism, resulting in our anti-democratic political culture and ultimately the insurrection. For the West, he says, the question becomes what can function as *our* guardian of democracy?

Democracy from Below

The State is not the only, or arguably even the most important, actor in democratic society. As Dewey insisted, democracy is not a form of government but a way of life. Some of our authors prioritize citizen action in non-government organizations or loosely connected online networks.

Judy Whipps, in “Addressing Toxic Nationalism with Addams and Balch,” draws on the wisdom of Nobel laureates Jane Addams and Emily Greene Balch. Addams promotes “intentional openness to multiple perspectives” as a counter

to toxic nationalism. The term “intentional openness” suggests distinct practices of self-development to make *natural* openness more deliberate and principled. The resulting awareness of and concern for others can then spark participation in non-government cross-cultural *projects* - the example Whipps provides is the international effort of young people to assist in post war reconstruction after World War II. Like Mosse, Addams and Balch envision a humane nationalism as a potentially creative force unifying diverse peoples. Like Zhou, these mentors also warn against the pressure of conformity implicit in identitarian politics. Balch (like Rydenfelt and Colapietro, below) asks us continually to challenge our beliefs to create a “vibrant diversity of thought.”

The theme of democratic *projects* is further developed by Wai Kit Choi, in “John Dewey, Grace Lee Boggs, and the Democracy Project in the Time of Right-Wing Populism.” Starting with the insight that right-wing populism in America did not begin with Donald Trump, Choi argues that the best way to counter it is through projects where “people work from below to enact democracy.” Participation

in social movements, working day to day with diverse others, “associational democracy.” Choi cites the movements for women's suffrage and civil rights as historical examples, and Grace Lee Boggs’ Detroit Summer and Black Lives Matter as contemporary instances.

Not all projects succeed - though all can be considered experiments that offer valuable lessons. The idea of democratic experiments is front and center in Henrik Rydenfelt’s “Educating for the Democratic Experiment.” Democracy, Rydenfelt states, is an experiment, not a set of fixed institutions, practices or ideals. For pragmatists, democracy then relies on inquiry - but even the methods of inquiry themselves are not fixed; they evolve to meet new challenges. Rydenfelt explores lessons to be learned from an environmental protest in Finland that led to angry, polarized altercations on social media that drowned out the initial point of the protest. Remarkably, Rydenfelt suggests that even the January 6th insurrection may be considered a democratic experiment. Rather than simply writing off the participants as anti-democratic, and failing to learn anything

from their actions, we must investigate the issues and ideals that motivated them and consider them on their merits.

For Rydenfelt, all democracy from below projects can (with charity) be viewed as experiments. Clearly participants in projects as unlike as the Elokapina environmental movement and the Proudboys will not see eye to eye on epistemic values. Justo Serrano-Zamora, in “Populism, Democratic Experimentalism, and Neoliberalism’s Epistemic Challenge to Democracy,” takes up this issue. He notes that while knowledge and truth are always vulnerable, the current situation involves new factors such as digital technologies, the marketization of information on social media, and the glaring incapacity of contemporary epistemic authorities to resolve pressing issues. These factors erode two epistemic conditions for democracy: trust in epistemic authorities and a broad orientation toward truth.

Serrano Zamora asks how we can distinguish and evaluate the different epistemic orientations of populism and democratic experimentalism - approaches often conflated by the mainstream media because they are both

attempts at ‘democracy from below’ to combat neoliberalism. He notes two main differences. First, populism turns away from rational inquiry in favor of experiential immediacy and emotion, while experimentalism articulates experience and emotion *within* inquiry. Second, experimentalism distances itself from atomic individualism in favor of collective inquiry with spaces to accommodate conflict. Experimentalism is thus more likely to move in the direction of restoring the epistemic conditions for democracy.

Right-wing pundits ironically characterize progressive attitudes as “woke,” because some left populists appropriated the term from African-Americans who reminded themselves to “stay woke” after Martin Luther King stated that we have to stay awake to racial injustice; they applied the term “woke” to themselves to claim they are speaking from an elevated, more consciously evolved, moral vantage point - thus displaying an unappealing arrogant elitism. The right has then used the resentment against this “woke” stance to fan flames of resentment against all those advocating for social justice; In particular, it has denounced

demands for removal of monuments to racists as arrogant “erasure of the past” by the woke “cancel culture” Sophie Ward, in “Material Culture in the Identitarian Episteme: Dewey and the War on Woke,” counters this attack by taking up Black Lives Matter protests against these statues. She turns to Dewey’s account of cultural change to make her case. There is nothing “neutral” in describing the opposed experiential responses to the statues as merely “different but equally valid.” For Dewey, the moral function of art is to remove prejudice, to “do away with the scales that keep the eye from seeing,” to “tear away the veils due to wont and custom.” For Dewey, the ‘rhythms in human history’ (Dewey, 2005, p. 262) move us beyond prior ways of engaging with the world. For Ward, we have moved beyond the “nation state” *episteme* - within which slave traders could be viewed as imperialist heroes - to an “identitarian” episteme centered on diversity and recognition, within which celebration of slave traders is outdated and bizarre.

Democracy as Collective, Communicative Inquiry

Perhaps Ward would agree that the “identitarian episteme” is itself a kind of democratic experiment, prompting inquiry into its effects. Democratic experimentalism requires a willingness to develop and test news ideas.

This theme is taken up by Vincent Colapietro in a fitting capstone to this section, “Essaying Democracy – Composing Publics.” For Colapietro, a democratic public has to constitute itself. No fixed constitution can define us. While our written constitution provides guidelines, few practices are as obstructive of democratic self-constitution as constitutional interpretations that attempt to fix its meaning.

But how are we to constitute ourselves? Cooperative inquiry is our method. But communication is an integral part of inquiry. Facts and interpretations have to be circulated, absorbed, digested, critiqued. A polity is a “city of words.” We constitute ourselves in our rich conversations - in periodicals, lectures, blogs ... protest speeches and even Facebook posts, I would add. Words, says Colapietro, are actions, just as actions *speak* - sometimes louder than any

words. Colapietro urges us to listen to our poets and artists as we speak; they help us - as Ward also insists - “to appreciate at a visceral *and* a cerebral level the words required to break through ‘the crust of conventionalized and routine consciousness’” (Dewey, LW 2, 349). In our collective practice of self-constituting we must, following William James, “catch the higher, healthier tone.” I take James (and Colapietro) to mean that in and by our words we must show respect for our audiences, our intellectual resources, ourselves and our own contributions - a powerful rebuke to populisms and their lower, contemptuous tone.

The editors of *Dewey Studies* are pleased to release our second special issue, on “After the Insurrection: Addressing the Crisis in Liberal Democracy”

This issue of *Dewey Studies* demonstrates the on-going diverse interest in, and influence of, John Dewey throughout the world. The editors ask readers to submit articles to Associate Editor Austin Rooney (austin.rooney@camden.rutgers.edu), ideas for panels and special issues, interviews, research notes to Paul Cherlin (cherlin.paul.b@gmail.com), and book reviews and composite review articles to Reviews Editor Daniel Brunson (daniel.brunson@morgan.edu).