Review

Reviewed Work(s): Democracy and Education by John Dewey

Review by: J. E. Creighton

Source: *The Philosophical Review*, Sep., 1916, Vol. 25, No. 5 (Sep., 1916), pp. 735-741

Published by: Duke University Press on behalf of Philosophical Review

Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/2178611

The book also contains new material, as, for example, the account from the manuscript of the dialogue between a Christian and a Philosopher written by Gilbert Crispin, one of Anselm's disciples. Some account of this dialogue had been given before in Armitage Robinson's monograph on Crispin, but that given here is fuller and it throws a flood of light on the intellectual atmosphere, the temper of philosophical and theological controversy, of the time. And even where the material is familiar, the author has the happy knack of setting it forth in new light. He is never dull; he entertains while he instructs.

H. N. GARDINER.

SMITH COLLEGE.

Democracy and Education. An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education. By JOHN DEWEY. New York, The Macmillan Company, 1916.—pp. xii, 434.

Although this book appears in a text-book series, it is something more than a compilation or systematization of existing educational doctrines. In addition to the great reputation which the author possesses as a philosophical teacher and writer, he has been known for many years as one of the country's foremost thinkers on educational questions, and his books and articles on this subject have had a far-reaching influence. In the present volume, the connection of education with democracy, to which he had frequently referred in his previous writings, is emphasized and given the central place. "Since education is a social process, and there are many kinds of societies, a criterion for educational criticism and construction implies a *particular* social ideal" (p. 115). "Particularly is it true that a society which not only changes but which has the ideal of such change as will improve it, will have different standards and methods of education from one which aims simply at the perpetuation of its own customs" (p. 94). The following paragraph from the author's preface sets forth in the most succinct possible form the scope and purpose of the book:

"The following pages embody an endeavor to detect and state the ideas implied in a democratic society and to apply these ideas to the problem of the enterprise of education. The discussion includes an indication of the constructive aims and methods of public education as seen from this point of view, and a critical estimate of the theories of knowing and moral development which were formulated in earlier social conditions, but which still operate, in societies nominally democratic, to hamper the adequate realization of the democratic ideal.

As will appear from the book itself, the philosophy stated in this book connects the growth of democracy with the development of the experimental method in the sciences, evolutionary ideas in the biological sciences, and the industrial reorganization, and is concerned to point out the change in subject matter and method of education indicated by these developments."

The first division of the book (Chapters I–VI, pp. 1–93) discusses the nature of education in general terms, without reference to the form which its activities and purposes take when applied to the conditions of a democratic society. The position adopted is that which Professor Dewey has made familiar in his previous writings. Education is achieved by doing, and it is the business of those who direct education to provide such an environmental material or subject matter of education, as will both provide the instinctive activities their proper exercise and also organize them with reference to some end supplied by society. We read much in these chapters of stimuli and response; but one has always to remember that the environment which furnishes the stimuli is social as well as physical, and the experiences are educative in the true sense just in as far as the 'responses' are responses of intelligence and emotion as well as of muscular movement. "The social environment consists of all the activities of fellow beings that are bound up in the carrying on of the activities of any one of its members. . . . By doing his share in the associated activity, the individual appropriates the purpose which actuates it, becomes familiar with its methods and subject matters, acquires needed skill, and is saturated with its emotional spirit" (p. 26). This, in spite of the biological form of statement, does not seem when explained to differ materially from Plato's doctrine regarding the necessity of supplying the proper 'pasturage' for the soul. Professor Dewey would, however, probably say that it is intended to emphasize more the function of the environment in calling out and organizing the activities of the individual. Moreover, the necessity of supplying a natural environment instead of an artificial one, and thus avoiding the danger that the school shall come to occupy itself with symbols which have grown artificial and unmeaning because of their lack of connection with the concrete activities of the community, is something much more urgent in modern times than it was in the ancient world.

In the more detailed analysis and discussion of education which follows these opening chapters, a democratic society is assumed as the criterion and standard. "A democracy," as Professor Dewey says, "is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of asso-

ciated living, of conjoint communicated experience" (p. 101). "A society which makes provision for participation in its good of all its members on equal terms and which secures flexible readjustment of its institutions through interaction of the different forms of associated life is in so far democratic. Such a society must have a type of education which gives individuals a personal interest in social relationships and control, and the habits of mind which secure social changes without introducing disorder" (p. 115). It is of course impossible here to give anything like an adequate summary of the author's discussions and conclusions. The main guiding principles which he derives from the conception of a democratic society are the necessity of a genuine communication of experience, not only between the members of the same group, but between one group and another; and also that this communication of experience should be reciprocal, as between individual and individual, or group and group. In education this would obviously imply, amongst other things, that the aim of education cannot be imposed externally upon the pupils, by teachers or 'educational authorities,' that the pupil is at the same time a fellow-worker, and must be given an opportunity to contribute to the educative process which is going on in the group with which he is associated.

The democratic conception is in general opposed to setting up divisions and dualisms, and to the recognition of the superior or ultimate authority of one sphere or division and opposing another to it as something subordinate and 'lower.' In education these are found in such antitheses as 'social efficiency' and 'culture', 'interest and discipline,' 'method' and 'subject matter,' etc. These again are found to rest upon certain philosophical dualisms that are implied in the classical systems of philosophy, such as body and mind, the mind and the world, the individual and his relationships to others. Underlying all these assumptions, as most fundamental, there is the "isolation of mind from activity involving physical conditions, bodily organs, material appliances, and natural objects" (p. 377). It is this idea of 'mind' as something distinct from nature and society, something 'inner' or 'spiritual,' as opposed to what is natural and controls action, that Professor Dewey finds frequent occasion for criticising as obstructive to the democratic idea of education. As opposed to this assumption, his own philosophy, as he himself describes it, is based upon the following conceptions: "The biological continuity of human impulses and instincts with natural energies; the dependence of the growth of mind upon participation in conjoint activities having a common purpose; the influence of the physical

environment through the uses made of it in the social medium; the necessity of utilization of individual variations in desire and thinking for a progressively developing society; the essential unity of method and subject matter; the intrinsic continuity of ends and means; the recognition of mind as thinking which perceives and tests the meanings of behavior" (p. 377).

Text-books on any subject are apt to be dull, and those in education are frequently distinguished in this respect; but the author's mode of presenting educational issues so as to render them something more fundamental than mere pedagogy, his grasp of philosophical principles and his power of suggestive and penetrating criticism, render this volume a notable exception. It is no threshing over of old straw, but a vigorous discussion and criticism of educational ideas from a point of view whose implications have hitherto been recognized only in a partial and superficial way. The application of the author's principles leads, it would appear, to no serious innovations in one sense; that is, in his hands, at least, they are not made to support any attack upon this or that subject, or any radicalism that is completely subversive of traditional values in education. This may be illustrated by reference to his discussion of 'culture' and 'social efficiency' as aims. When these are properly interpreted there is no antagonism between them. "Ultimately social efficiency means neither more nor less than capacity to share in a give and take of experience. It covers all that makes one's own experience more worth while to others, and all that enables one to participate more richly in the worth-while experiences of others" (p. 141). "The aim of efficiency (like any educational aim) must be included within the process of experience. When it is measured by tangible external products, and not by the achieving of a distinctly valuable experience, it becomes materialistic" (p. 143). In the same way, interest and discipline are not opposed, but connected. Discipline, or the development of power, is the result of intelligently directed interests. "To organize education so that natural active tendencies shall be fully enlisted in doing something, while seeing to it that the doing requires observation, the acquisition of information, and the use of a constructive imagination, is what most needs to be done to improve social conditions" (p. 161). The same principles serve to show the invalidity of the opposition between intellectual and practical studies, between physical science and humanism. "Humanism means at bottom being imbued with an intelligent sense of human interests. . . . Knowledge *about* man, information as to his past, familiarity with his documented records

of literature, may be as technical a possession as the accumulation of physical details. Men may keep busy in a variety of ways, making money, acquiring facility in laboratory manipulation, or in amassing a store of facts about linguistic matters, or the chronology of literary productions. Unless such activity reacts to enlarge the imaginative vision of life, it is on a level with the busy work of children. . . ." On the other hand, "any study so pursued that it increases concern for the value of life, any study producing greater sensitiveness to social well-being and greater ability to promote that well-being is humane study" (pp. 336–7).

It is not necessary to accept as final Mr. Dewey's philosophical principles in order to sympathize largely with his criticism of the traditional dualisms and of the corresponding antagonisms in educational theory and practice. Pragmatism has no exclusive claim to be a philosophy of democracy, or a philosophy which is open-eyed to the results and methods of the sciences. I make this remark because writers of this school frequently convey the opposite assumption. The conclusions which I have quoted from Mr. Dewey's book, will, I think, commend themselves to readers who are unable to subscribe to the pragmatic formula as a philosophy. Nevertheless, in all such matters the emphasis and ultimate form of interpretation depend upon a philosophical view. Mr. Dewey deprecates the attempt to derive educational principles from a ready-made philosophy, and it would be quite unfair to suggest that this has been his own procedure. No one can complain that he recognizes only, 'external' facts or narrowly 'practical' values. Indeed, he frequently goes so far in insisting on ideal values as to make one feel that the old pragmatic categories such as 'stimulus' and 'response,' 'habit,' 'tension' and 'adjustment' are not longer applicable as descriptions of the situation. But in the end, whether consistently or inconsistently, these 'ideal' values are given a pragmatic interpretation. Whatever may be the position indicated by passages such as I have quoted, one finds, I think, that their force is materially modified when they are read in the total context of the chapter or section in which they occur. In the end the pragmatic theory seems to be the standard for the interpretation of the results, and the outcome of the volume as a whole rests upon the naturalistic categories of the individual and the democratic society which that theory assumes. The main question then is regarding the adequacy of the author's categories to describe a process whose significance is to improve the quality of experience. In estimating the validity of this philosophy of education, one must

not base one's judgment wholly upon the truth and suggestiveness of many of its statements, or upon the timeliness and vigor of its criticisms. One is, as I have said, likely to find oneself agreeing with so much that the book contains and admiring so greatly its sanity and breadth of view as to take its general principles for granted. But, after all, before subscribing to its conclusions unqualifiedly, one is bound to raise the question whether a naturalistic activity is capable of furnishing any principle of organization for experience or affording any basis for the reconciliation of its conflicting interests. Do we get any genuine spiritual principle so long as the mental is regarded as simply *correlative* with the physical, and not as a universal which expresses itself not only in the function of coöperating actively with what lies beyond itself, but also as the capacity of returning to itself and finding itself at home in the realm of meaning? If this conception can be maintained, as I think it can, by an examination of what is most typically human in experience, the process of education in a democratic society takes on a new meaning and suggests a different interpretation from that of the volume before us. This position, however, does not involve the return to dualism, or to an abstract view of mind as something isolated from the body, or the setting up of superior classes within the state. One can welcome the author's criticism here. But Professor Dewey himself, in his admirable analysis of the relations involved in the organized mode of life called democracy, exhibits, it seems to me, the necessity of going beyond the naturalistic view of mind, and recognizing that progress and education consist in the progressive attainment, conservation and employment of universal meanings. This is the home and medium of intelligence. One can no more construe mind exclusively in terms of activity and reorganization than in terms of appreciation and contemplation, nor are the latter to be regarded as merely means to the former. In criticizing the static view of experience, we have come to emphasize too exclusively its prospective and futuristic character, as if it were a natural activity that had value only as a means. In this way we fail to realize that intelligence also involves contemplation, or living consciously in the realm of the universal. Is it not true that for the improvement of the quality of experience the contemplative factor requires to be recognized and nourished, not as a mere guide to activity, but as something which is in itself an essential moment of mind? Intelligence exists and develops only as it progressively comes to itself, learns to understand its own procedure, to conserve and appreciate, not less than to apply, its results, to comprehend and take possession of its own kingdom. Of

course this activity is not something that can go on fruitfully without commerce with what lies beyond the individual mind, without the wisdom that comes through practical activity and the give and take of the social process. But, after all, is it not necessary to emphasize today the need of contemplation, of enriching our minds by the insight of the past? Does not the member of a democratic society still need to develop within himself a centre to which he may always return, as it were to his home? The experience of the race proves the need and value of contemplation, and it is surely a shallow view which dismisses it as a world of idle dreams. Nor can we separate it from intelligence as constituting merely an emotional or æsthetic form of experience. There is something truncated, something high and dry that is not wholly human, in the view of intelligence which is based on the reflex-arc concept. The description of intelligence exclusively in terms of 'planning,' 'reorganizing,' 'reconstituting,' 'purposive' activity' may be necessary in order to bring it under a naturalistic category, but it is surely a caricature even of the imperfect life of reason that ordinary individuals realize. None of these terms is rich enough or sufficiently inclusive to express the nature of a principle that is genuinely spiritual. And by calling intelligence, as it manifests itself in man and in society, a 'spiritual' principle, I mean that this life consists just in at once maintaining and transcending oppositions, in being all that nature is and going beyond it, in developing itself through the use of external means and yet making the 'outer' a true 'inner.' These are the facts of the thinking experience. Unless they be straitened and truncated, limited to examples of building bridges and finding one's way, etc., they overflow the pragmatic formulas.

It seems a pity to bring the old issue of Pragmatism into the discussion of such a fresh piece of work as this volume contains. But if the reviewer has not succeeded in avoiding this issue, he can plead that in this respect he has only followed the author's example. Quite apart from this subject of controversy, however, the reader cannot fail to be impressed with the author's thoroughness and sincerity of treatment. The most important and original contribution of the book seems to me to consist in the discussion of the implications of Democracy in the process of Education.

J. E. CREIGHTON.

CORNELL UNIVERSITY.