



Introduction: Dewey's Lifelong Crusade for Participatory Democracy

*It is not possible to run a course aright when the goal itself
is not rightly placed.*

FRANCIS BACON, *NOVUM ORGANON* (1620)

*The true starting point of history is always some present
situation with its problems.*

JOHN DEWEY, *DEMOCRACY AND EDUCATION* (1916)

*Democracy must begin at home, and its home is the
neighborly community.*

JOHN DEWEY, *THE PUBLIC AND ITS PROBLEMS* (1927)

IN THE RAPIDLY ACCELERATING GLOBAL ERA in which we now live, human beings must solve a vast array of unprecedentedly complex problems. Perhaps the most complex and most frightening problem is, what is to be done to prevent the possibility of a world perpetually terrorized by suicidal fanatics capable of acquiring and using scientifically and technologically advanced weapons of mass destruction to produce horrors instantly experienced by a worldwide audience? Given the proclaimed dedication of universities to critical intelligence, and their unique constellation of formidable resources to develop it, academics, we submit, have a unique responsibility to help solve that problem—indeed all the problems intensified by globalization.

To cope with the perilous situation we now confront in our radically different world, our more or less continued adherence to

Cardinal John Henry Newman's nineteenth-century elitist *Idea of a University* as a classical Ivory Tower in which British schoolboys could be ritualistically transformed into British "gentlemen" is dangerously anachronistic and dysfunctional. But what should replace it? Almost everywhere in the "developed" world, academics, to varying degrees, are grappling with that difficult problem. The best way to begin to solve it, we contend, is for academics to accept the general theory John Dewey proposed in 1888: participatory democracy "approaches most nearly the ideal of all social organization; that in which the individual and society are organic to each other."¹

The strategy we propose for university and societal transformation is based on the assumption that Dewey was right: participatory democracy is the form of human society that would best enable all human beings to lead long, healthy, active, peaceful, virtuous, happy lives. Accordingly, to help solve the awesome problems confronting humanity in the twenty-first century, the highest priority of democratically minded academics in all developed societies should be helping their own communities and nations create the truly democratic society that Dewey envisioned as necessary if the world were to be transformed into a "Great Community," an integrated world of interactive, interdependent, truly collaborative, truly democratic societies. *Realizing that goal should receive the degree of desperate urgency given the Manhattan Project during World War II.*

During his unusually long lifetime, Dewey made an unusually wide range of theoretical contributions to human knowledge and societal progress. According to Robert Westbrook, one of his most insightful biographers, Dewey's lifelong efforts to advance participatory democracy constituted his most important theoretical contribution. The following is Professor Westbrook's elegant assessment of Dewey's work:

Among liberal intellectuals of the twentieth century, Dewey was the most important advocate of participatory democracy, that is, of the belief that democracy, as an ethical ideal, calls upon men and women to build communities in which the necessary opportunities and resources are available for every

individual to realize fully his or her particular capacities and powers through participation in political, social, and cultural life. This ideal rested on a “faith in the capacity of human beings for intelligent judgment and action if proper conditions are furnished,” a faith Dewey argued, “so deeply embedded in the methods which are intrinsic to democracy that when a professed democrat denies the faith he convicts himself of treachery to his profession.”²

Westbrook views Dewey as the most important advocate of participatory democracy. But he acknowledges that Dewey never actually developed, let alone implemented, a comprehensive strategy capable of realizing his general theories in real-world practice. Following Westbrook’s lead, in this book we pay homage to Dewey by trying to transcend him. By trying to transcend him, we mean reflectively building on both his general theories and his empirical experiments in order to solve what we call the *Dewey Problem*. What we mean by the Dewey Problem is, what *specifically is to be done beyond theoretical advocacy to transform American society and other developed societies into participatory democracies capable of helping to transform the world into a “Great Community”?*

As Dewey’s lifelong failure to solve it demonstrates, the Dewey Problem is an extremely difficult problem. Precisely for that reason, in a world increasingly suffering from a growing array of horrors manifesting themselves daily, we contend that developing possible solutions to the Dewey Problem should now constitute the highest priority for democratically minded academics throughout the world. Since 1985, we and our colleagues across the United States and elsewhere in the world have been working to do so by developing the concept of “university-assisted community schools” (defined below) *and* by effectively creating national and international organizations to realize that concept in real-world practice. University-assisted community schools, in our judgment, constitute the best practical means to help realize Dewey’s general theory of participatory democracy.

In later chapters, we will show *why* we believe that university-assisted community schools constitute the best practical means yet

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devised to realize Dewey's utopian ends and *how* they can best be developed. To provide the theoretical basis of our argument, we begin with a somewhat detailed exposition and critique of Dewey's own changing attempts to solve the Dewey Problem.