



1-1-1980

John Dewey and the ploys of revisionism

Joe R. Burnett

Follow this and additional works at: <https://newprairiepress.org/edconsiderations>



Part of the [Higher Education Commons](#)



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 4.0 License](#).

Recommended Citation

Burnett, Joe R. (1980) "John Dewey and the ploys of revisionism," *Educational Considerations*: Vol. 7: No. 2. <https://doi.org/10.4148/0146-9282.1915>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by New Prairie Press. It has been accepted for inclusion in Educational Considerations by an authorized administrator of New Prairie Press. For more information, please contact cads@k-state.edu.

Revisionism is really a proponent of the structural status quo.

John Dewey and the ploys of revisionism

By Joe R. Burnett

This article discusses some of the ploys which might be used for arguing that John Dewey's social and political philosophy can be interpreted as an instance of needed revisionism in American thought.

What is meant, first of all, by "revisionism?" What I shall take it to mean is the modern tendency to reinterpret so-called liberal thinkers of roughly the first half of this century to show that they were in theory and/or practice illiberal. Specifically this would mean one or more of the following: that, while purporting or seeming to do otherwise,

- (1) their work did not support any major structural shifts in the corporate democracy which prevailed during that time (and, indeed, this time);
- (2) they supported an elitism, if yet not the traditional one; and/or
- (3) they supported centralist social control of the great bulk of Americans—in short, they supported a formal or informal, centralized oligarchy.

Dewey was the nation's major liberal philosopher during the period, and he probably had the greatest intellectual influence of any liberal thinker. He is a tempting target for revisionists.

What it would take to show that Dewey really was a

proponent of the structural status quo would be one or more of a number of things. One of these would be to show that his theoretical philosophy openly advocated the structural status quo. Another would be to show that the philosophy was so inconsistent or ambiguous that it could be used to almost any purpose. Still another would be that Dewey consistently took positions on practical issues which supported the structural status quo, even if his theory apparently required that he would act otherwise.

Now I think Dewey's theory is under attack on all three grounds; but, I further think that the revisionists are not aware that they should keep the attacks separate, for the attacks require different sorts of evidence and argument.

It is easy (but probably wrong), for instance, to view a few specific practices of Dewey, conclude that his theory must necessarily justify such practices, and then condemn his theory. Or, it is easy (but wrong) to become impatient with the scholarship necessary to fully grasp Dewey's socio-political philosophy, and "force" a rendering of it which leads to faulty interpretations of these practices.

Herein I concentrate particularly, but not exclusively, on what it is necessary for a revisionist to take into account if he is to succeed in showing that Dewey's social and political philosophy or theory supports or even lends itself to corporate, elitist centralism. I do not think the revisionist can succeed, but let us look at the case.

A Case in Revisionism

Why might a revisionist think he could succeed? If the critic approaches Dewey's philosophy with the idea that a political theory is basic to Dewey's or anyone's social philosophy, he might think so. Dewey's political philosophy, his theory of the forms of political power, will certainly appear wishy-washy if that is all one looks to. With few exceptions, Dewey rooted his political theory in a social theory of democracy. This is evident, although the reasons for it are not yet fully clear, in his early and middle works. There is, for instance, the classic passage in *Democracy and Education*, in which he gives us the two criteria which he says can be "extracted" from instances of community:

Now in any social group whatever . . . we find some interest in common, and we find a certain amount of interaction and cooperative intercourse with other groups. From these two traits we derive our standard. How numerous and varied are the interests which are consciously shared? How full and free is the interplay with other forms of association?¹

Many student newcomers—but not only they, apparently—to Dewey's thought sense a major problem here: they notice that the criteria do not specify majority rule, a canon of democratic political thought. Dewey himself says that " . . . democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated living."² And this makes it fair to ask if there cannot be modes of democratic community or associated living which do not abide by majority rule. There obviously could be for Dewey; e.g., the family with parents dominant, the extended community and neighborhood with elders dominant, occupational and professional groupings with knowledgeable and skilled craftspeople dominant. These ordinarily are not examples of

majority rule, but they can, if and when they are consistent with the criteria, be examples of democratic community. The criteria simply are **technically** non-specific about political **forms**.

If again, one is looking for political forms or power systems as basic, it equally can be noted that the political form of representative government is not explicitly sanctioned. Obviously the criteria demand participation and openness, but the form is left unspecified.

A third thing can mislead the unwary, and that is Dewey's heavy emphasis upon inquiry, the method of intelligence, and science. Not infrequently Dewey speaks of the mission of science as being almost necessarily central to reconstructing a disintegrating American society. It is easy, and I think on a few occasions, warranted, to interpret him as meaning by "science" the body of scientists and/or the social institution of science. If one makes this leap, and it is a leap in the context of the corpus of his writing, it seems easy to conclude that Dewey is advocating a scientific meritocracy.

There is another possible source for the view that Dewey "really" did not countenance more than a modicum of participatory democracy. He sometimes speaks of the role of the citizen in a manner which seems curiously unqualified to the ardent democrat. Thus, he writes that:

The devotion of democracy to education is a familiar fact. The superficial explanation is that a government resting upon popular suffrage cannot be successful unless those who elect and who obey their governors are educated. Since a democratic society repudiates the principle of external authority, it must find a substitute in voluntary disposition and interest; these can be created only by education.³

"Laissez Faire Liberalism"

These, I think, are the major ploys which can be used to argue that Dewey's theory really is not democratic in any new sense, but simply another rendering of classic, laissez faire liberalism—this time with liberal intellectuals replacing, as the elite, the captains of industry and the other traditional socio-political interest groups of corporate democracy.

These arguments do not in fact "connect" with Dewey's **theory**, however. Perhaps the most striking way of showing this is by giving his arguments against making absolute such political devices as majority rule and representative government.

About the latter, Dewey maintains that it suggests or "contains about all that is relevant to **political** democracy."⁴ But he views this political notion as having arisen out of the push and pull of people seeking immediate redress of felt wrongs or needs, rather than some cosmic sense of justice. The ethical defense of the notion lies rather in its use, under proper circumstances, for obtaining the quality and fact of community.⁵

The argument which is relevant in the case of representative government is most succinctly and clearly made by Dewey in the allied case of majority rule. It, like representative government, is one of the things he refers to as a political **form** of democracy, which was devised at a particular time in history to protect the values of community. He refuses to make it anything more than that, an historical provision, for fear that it, **rather than what it is to protect**, will become the important object. To do other-

wise would allow his philosophy to become a tool of what properly is called on occasion, "the tyranny of the majority." The more important thing is what comes before and after a vote:

... antecedent debates, modifications of views to meet the opinions of minorities, the relative satisfaction given the latter by the fact that it has had a chance and that next time it may be successful in becoming a majority.⁶

In a word, what is more important than majority vote and majority rule is community before the fact of them and community afterwards!

The emphasis upon, or de-emphasis of, majority rule and representative government as **forms** of democracy, then, hardly suffices to question the centrality of the democratic notion in Dewey's philosophy.⁷

What then of his emphasis upon science, the institution and scientists? Do they represent a meritocratic class which merely is to substitute for the businessmen-industrialists in a nonetheless centralized, corporate society? The question and its answers are so important to Dewey's social philosophy that I shall not apologize for quoting at length. In his discussion of an ideal society, which he referred to as the "Great Community," he did not foresee corporateness or centralization which could (i.e., **should**) dictate life in decentralized communities. The Great Community, he said,

... can never possess all the qualities which mark a local community. It will do its final work in ordering the relations and enriching the experience of local associations. The invasion and partial destruction of the life of the latter by outside uncontrolled agencies is the immediate source of the instability, disintegration and restlessness which characterize the present epoch.⁸

And, indeed, he traced part of the problem precisely to experts:

No government by experts in which the masses do not have the chance to inform the experts as to their needs can be anything but an oligarchy managed in the interests of the few. ... The world has suffered more from leaders and [expert] authorities than from the masses.⁹

Or again:

Rule by an economic class may be disguised from the masses; rule by experts could not be covered up. It could be made to work only if the intellectuals became the willing tools of big economic interests. Otherwise they would have to ally themselves with the masses, and that implies, once more, a share in government by the latter.¹⁰

Or, still again: "A class of experts is inevitably so removed from common interests as to become a class with private interests and private knowledge, which in social matters is not knowledge at all."¹¹

This should put to rest the idea that Dewey favored a centralized form of interventionist, governmental control. It should put to rest the idea of corporate democracy. It should put to rest the idea of a meritocracy of experts or technocratic meritocracy.

The final part of this ploy, Dewey's occasional failure to qualify himself about the function of citizen determination of rulers and "rules" is easy enough to dismiss

as important in his total writings. Generally the qualification of necessary citizen control is present if one will but pursue the discussion. In the instance cited earlier, wherein Dewey speaks of those "who obey their governors," one finds the qualification eventually forthcoming:

It is the aim of progressive education to take part in correcting unfair privilege and unfair deprivation, not to perpetuate them. Wherever social control means subordination to class authority, there is danger that industrial education will be dominated by acceptance of the *status quo*.¹²

And, speaking of citizenship, he says there is a required "... ability to judge men and measures wisely and to take a determining part in making as well as obeying laws."¹³

Even stronger statements can be found, although perhaps few in *Democracy and Education*. But, if we turn to his greatest work on social and political philosophy, we read that,

... the current has set steadily in one direction: toward democratic forms. That government exists to serve its community, and that this cannot be achieved unless the community itself shares in selecting its governors and determining their policies is a deposit of fact left, as far as we can see, permanently in the wake of doctrines and forms, however transitory the latter. They are not the whole of the democratic idea, but they express it in its political phase. ... We have every reason to think that whatever changes may take place in existing democratic machinery, they will be of a sort to make the interest of the public a more supreme guide and criterion of governmental activity, and to enable the public to form and manifest its purposes still more authoritatively.¹⁴

This discussion of the ploy of attacking Dewey's social and political theory of democracy should not conclude without emphasizing the point of departure which makes it mainly possible. I take that to be an erroneous construal of the political aspect of Dewey's thought to primarily inform the social aspect. It works just the opposite for Dewey. The social concept of democracy is a necessary determinant of the political. Ultimately Dewey has his eye on the qualities of community associations which can meet the two criteria which were cited. Such qualities are not forms of democracy, they are the facts of democracy. As he says,

Wherever there is conjoint activity whose consequences are appreciated as good by all singular persons who take part in it, and where the realization of the good is such as to effect an energetic desire and effort to sustain it in being just because it is a good shared by all, there is in so far a community. This clear consciousness of a communal life, in all its implications, constitutes the idea of democracy.¹⁵

The political problem is to determine how, upon given occasions of difficulty, to effect this fact and consciousness.

Finally, before shifting the analysis, one should recur to the notion of inquiry or method of intelligence. A con-

dition for democracy in his (and, one is sure, our) time was widely diffused ability to be critically intelligent. The public requires this to rule itself, to select, inform, and judge those who will represent it. This is a necessity of the age, heavily determined by science, technology, and technological-industrial innovation. And, in this connection, one can say that it is a condition of the one form of democracy which does seem to be implicit in the social theory of democracy; viz., participatory democracy. To this point we will return.

Discussion Relevant to Literature

As part of this paper, I want to criticize one particular analysis of Dewey's thought, partly to show that the above discussion is relevant to the current literature, and partly to show that one need not expect the three types of ploys to be so neatly isolated as my initial statement might unintentionally have suggested.

The particular analysis is found in Walter Feinberg's, *Reason and Rhetoric*. Dewey is treated as one, although perhaps the central, figure in arguing a revisionist case; and, it is solely upon his analysis of Dewey that I concentrate. That I find this analysis very seriously flawed should not be taken to indicate anything pro or con about his general thesis or his analysis of other so-called liberal thinkers. The general thesis does, however, set the context for the discussion of Dewey.

The major oversight of progressive reform was a failure to fully understand the implications of its recognition that every social structure is an embodiment of a set of values and that the institutions in which these values are expressed have a strong influence on determining the desires and inclinations of the members of a society. Thus instead of a prolonged evaluation of the principles of social organization itself, the progressives insisted on evaluating institutions merely on the basis of their functional integration.¹⁷

One would expect to find that Dewey was excepted from this "the major oversight of progressive reform;" for, if there is anything evident (in the earlier quotes, for example) it is that Dewey did not make the mistake referred to by Feinberg. But Dewey is precisely the example chosen. Dewey, he writes,

... merely denied that the social interest was best served by the business establishment and proposed that institutions be altered so as to free technology from its control. His alternative was to change the position of the science and engineering establishments for that of [the] business establishment assuming perhaps that as the interest of science was served so too would be that of society. Yet like the *laissez-faire* theorist, no criteria other than functional ones were established to judge whether or not the social interest was being served.¹⁸

The criteria of democracy and the concept of idealized community provide precisely the principles Feinberg says are lacking. Further, the whole notion of an elitist meritocracy is, as we have seen, repugnant to Dewey. Still, Feinberg also could write:

Dewey was suggesting as did Plato before him, that the intellectual's place was within the

power structure, guiding the political leadership in the governance of society. Unlike Plato, however, who felt there were definable limits under which such a role should be assumed, Dewey expressed no limits, and no alternatives.¹⁹

Now all of this is sheer error: Dewey flatly refused to make the functional arguments supplant his principles. Dewey's distinctions between social democracy (ethical and moral principles) and political democracy (forms of governing) is spelled out most thoroughly in *The Problems of Man*, particularly in the last three chapters; but, curiously, this is a volume to which Feinberg has no reference in *Reason and Rhetoric*, although he did make use of it in an earlier article which is partially incorporated in the book.²⁰

If one looks more closely at Feinberg's account of Dewey, he finds some other curious things which deserve mention. For instance, in two quotations from Dewey, Feinberg supplies italics without indicating that he has done so. In the first case, I judge that the effect is to make Dewey seem precisely to support functional arrangements rather than democratic principles. On the latter of these two occasions Feinberg even repeats, apparently for emphasis, just the passage to which he has added the italics-emphasis, again not noting the italics are his, not Dewey's. I quote both passages.

The Deweys' descriptive citation of the Gary School in *Schools of Tomorrow* provides some idea of the techniques that were available for this purpose.

They (the immigrant parents) are naturally suspicious of Government and social authority . . . and it is very important that their children should have some real knowledge on which to base a sounder judgment. Besides giving them this, the schools try to teach American standards of living to the pupils and so their parents. On entering school every pupil gives the school office, besides the usual name, age, and address, certain information about his family, its size, its resources, and the character of the home he lives in. This record is kept in the school and transferred if the child moves out of the school district. . . . By comparing these with any family record, it is a simple matter to tell if the family are [sic] living under proper moral and hygienic conditions. . . . If bad conditions are due to ignorance or poverty, the teacher finds out what can be done to remedy them, and sees to it that the family learns how they can better themselves. **If conditions are very bad, neighborhood public opinion is worked up through the children on the block.**²¹

The second passage: Dewey reported

. . . it is still possible for a scholar to speak out on the controversial side of an issue if he approaches the problem "in such an objective, historic, and constructive manner as not to excite the prejudice or inflame the passion even of those who **thoroughly** disagree with him." The intent of the statement is puzzling since

clearly issues of academic freedom will never arise if prejudice or passion are not inflamed, but its effect is to place the burden of proof on the academic style of the intellectual dissenter even to the point of holding him responsible for the reactions of those "who **thoroughly** disagree with him." Presumably a passionate reaction was to be taken as evidence of some kind of deficiency in the presentation. After all, Dewey reminded his readers, the scholar "needs tact as well as scholarship."²²

Further, regarding this last passage, Feinberg does not note that Dewey goes on to qualify the importance and nature of "tact," Dewey saying that " . . . 'tact' suggests perhaps too much a kind of juggling diplomacy with the questions at issue."²³

There is another passage I think one must note, although there are others still.²⁴ This one seems to "presume" on Dewey's intentions, however contrary to his democratic principles. In the context of a discussion of Dewey's account of evaluation and his ethical theory, Feinberg says,

Part of the appeal of Dewey's argument lies in its philosophical ambiguity. For not everyone would agree that ethical behavior and evolutionary progress are the same thing or that the latter should serve as the criterion for the former. Some would even find peculiar the suggestion that our most cherished acts of altruism, such as caring for the old are best judged as preparations for war or other survival activity. If Dewey were putting forth only a factual claim, then all that could really be said is that at certain times in human history, there may be fortunate coincidences between ethical acts and evolutionary processes. But of course this watered down claim did not really suit his purposes and it was useful for him to leave the ambiguous quality alone. On the other hand, to suggest outright that evolutionary survival was to be the criterion for ethical activity would have been to provide some clear guidance as to how an ethical claim might be objectively judged. Yet precisely because such a criterion can be challenged on other grounds, it was again best for Dewey to allow the ambiguity to stand. However, Dewey's claim does require some analysis.²⁵

The passages in Dewey that are in question do not indicate to me that Dewey thought his best purposes would be served by ambiguity; indeed, this claim about what Dewey found "useful" and "best" seems merely to "poison the wells" and prejudice the very analysis which, it is claimed, is needed.

Three Ploys Illustrated

Now I think that Feinberg's analysis does illustrate the three ploys. There is the attack upon Dewey's theory of democracy, which does not work because of a faulty statement of that theory. There is the attempt to discredit the practice of Dewey as not genuinely liberal or democratic in a number of instances, a discrediting which does not seem convincing in the particular cases dealt with here. Finally, there **might** be the suggestion that Dewey's theory is so confused or ambiguous that it could sup-

port about any twist and turn which Dewey wished to make. But, I find this unconvincing.

Whatever the case, any ploy of revisionism in Dewey's theoretical thought has to start with a clear recognition of what he fashioned in his mature social and political thought on democracy. One can refer to Platonic and Hegelian influences on the early and middle-years of Dewey, but the "bottom line," as youth today are wont to say, for Dewey resides in the mature, **The Public and Its Problems**. Earlier I commented on the fact that one form of democracy seems to be implicit in his social conception of democracy. I deem it appropriate to quote him on that form, participatory democracy, as the bottom line of this paper. Any characterization of him as a centralist, elitist advocate of corporate democracy will be most convincing if it can deal with these words in their context:

The ballot box and majority rule are external and very largely mechanical symbols and expressions. . . . They are expedients, the best devices that at a certain time have been found, but beneath them there are the two ideas: first, the opportunity, the right and the duty of every individual to form some conviction and express some conviction regarding his own place in the social order, and the relations of that social order to his own welfare; second, the fact that each individual counts as one and one only on an equality with others, so that the final social will comes about as the cooperative expression of the ideas of many people. And I think it is perhaps only recently that we are realizing that [this] . . . idea is the essence of all sound education.²⁸

References

*I am deeply indebted to James D. Anderson, Clarence J. Karier, and Ralph Page—most particularly the latter—for numerous helpful comments on all aspects of the article. For helpful responses of a rather specific but important nature, I am most grateful to Patricia Amburgy, Jo Ann Boydston, John and Barbara Colson, Joseph L. DeVitis, Geoffrey Lasky, and Maxine Greene. These people share in any merit of the article; the shortcomings are my own.

¹ John Dewey, **Democracy and Education** (New York: Macmillan, 1916), p. 96. Also see pp. 100-102.

² *Ibid.*, p. 101.

³ *Ibid.*

* John Dewey, **The Public and Its Problems** (Denver: Alan Swallow, 1927), p. 82. Italics are Dewey's.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 30-34, 84-109.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 207-208.

⁷ One can see why Dewey might be a bane of political philosophers. They are apt to criticize him for having no developed theory of power or domination and, hence, no genuine political philosophy. The point, however, is that Dewey has a theory of social democracy to which, given its nature, political philosophy is secondary and, in a very real sense, from which it is derivative. One suspects that they criticize him for not having something as basic (power, domination, etc.) which, in the nature of the case, he wants to argue is not basic. Probably A.H. Somjee's **The Political Philosophy of John Dewey** (New York: Teachers College Press, 1968) is the most understanding of Dewey's basic position from the perspective of a political scientist/philosopher. Even Somjee seems to lament the lack of a completed or fully developed political philosophy on Dewey's part, however, as though this were Dewey's object. (*Ibid.*, pp. 138-140, 175-178.) His Chapter 4, "Dewey's Mature Political Philosophy," is highly recommended as background to this article. Also recommended is Wayne A.R.

Leys', "Dewey's Social, Political, and Legal Philosophy," in Jo Ann Boydston (Ed.), **Guide to the Works of John Dewey** (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press, 1970), pp. 131-155.

⁸ Dewey, **The Public and Its Problems**, pp. 211-212.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 208.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 205-206.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 207.

¹² Dewey, **Democracy and Education**, p. 140.

¹³ *Ibid.* Italics added.

¹⁴ Dewey, **The Public and Its Problems**, p. 146.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

¹⁶ Walter Feinberg, **Reason and Rhetoric** (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1975). Feinberg says in a later work that he is not a revisionist, and that his " . . . major concern in examining the works of John Dewey has been to understand the way in which liberal principles have been molded by the situation in which liberal thinkers have found themselves. In so far as this has entailed a criticism of Dewey and other liberals, it is for the purpose of understanding ourselves and our reaction to the present situation." "On Reading Dewey," **History of Education Quarterly**, 4, 4 (Winter, 1975), p. 395. I apologize for the fact that my criteria force upon him a label which he would rather not have. See his discussion in "Revisionist Scholarship and the Problem of Historical Context," **Teachers College Record**, 78, 3 (Feb., 1977), pp. 311-336.

¹⁷ Feinberg, **Reason and Rhetoric**, pp. 258-259. Italics are Feinberg's.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 259.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 224. Feinberg has correctly pointed out to some of his critics that he never denied Dewey's concern for community. "In one paragraph I wrote about Dewey's concern to have people be able 'to recognize themselves as members of a community, each striving to enrich the lives of all.' And I mention that Dewey also believed that if 'the community was to be a democratic one . . . its members were not to be manipulated from above.'" Feinberg, "On Reading Dewey," p. 401. His reference is to p. 495 of his "Progressive Education and Social Planning," **Teachers College Record**, 73, 4 (May, 1972), pp. 486-505. He also notes Dewey's concern in **Reason and Rhetoric**. But what kind of a concern can he be saying it is that Dewey has, if he is convinced that Dewey expressed no limits and no alternatives to the intellectuals' role in the power structure? One can take these two contentions, to paraphrase John Wisdom, to mean that when Dewey said he really believed in democracy and community, he meant that he did not believe in democracy and community really. For Dewey's equating of democracy and community, see the last quotation in Part II, herein.

²⁰ He does not there make the very strong charge, above, about the role of experts, but he does say: "In the last analysis his [Dewey's] concern for scientific intelligence is a statement of the need for experts in a highly complex technological society, and his appeal for democratic consensus is an attempt to create a citizenry that is able to see the wisdom of intelligence expertly exercised." Or, again:

One factor that separated Progressive educators from others was an expressed concern for the well-being and integrity of immigrant and racial minorities. At its best this concern mirrored the appeal for diversity that was an explicit part of Dewey's notion of community. At its worst it expressed the belief in experts, in authority, and in unity that was hidden in that same notion of community.

Walter Feinberg, "Progressive Education and Social Planning," pp. 485 and 496 respectively.

²¹ Feinberg, **Reason and Rhetoric**, pp. 209-210. Italics are Feinberg's. Feinberg and Henry Rosemont, Jr., use substantially the same quote, ending with the same sentence (not in italics this time) in another work. After the quotation they remark: "If any parent had doubts about the validity of their instinctive distrust of public authority, Dewey's description of the role of the teacher

would surely have reassured them that their doubts were firmly based in reality." "Teaching for the Welfare State," in Walter Feinberg and Henry Rosemont, Jr. (Eds.), *Work, Technology, and Education* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1975), p. 89. I do not think that this is an obvious conclusion except that the quotation ends where it does: had the paragraph in which it appears been concluded, the reader would have further read that:

From time to time an auditorium period is devoted to showing these maps and pointing out the good and bad features of the blocks and neighborhoods. Children always carry the news home to their parents, and as rents and accommodation are freely discussed, these reports are often acted upon. The parents are encouraged to come to the school and ask for information, and on more than one occasion some newly arrived family has moved from an overcrowded rear shack to a comfortable flat with the same rent because through the children they found out that their bad quarters were unnecessary. Because the school does this work to help, and as part of its regular program, it is accepted by the children and their parents as a matter of course. Information about improvements, sanitation, the size and comfort of the houses, and the rents, is given to the parents. If a block is poor a good block nearby where conditions are better and the rents the same, is shown them. Thus the schools not only teach the theory of good citizenship and social conditions, they give the children actual facts and conditions, so that they can see what is wrong and how it can be bettered.

The complete paragraph appears in John and Evelyn Dewey, *Schools of Tomorrow*, "Introduction" by William Wolfgang Brickman (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1962), pp. 147-148.

²² Feinberg, *Reason and Rhetoric*, pp. 228-229. Feinberg's italics.

²³ The exact sentence reads: "We may insist that a man needs tact as well as scholarship; or, let us say, sympathy with human interests—since 'tact' suggests perhaps too much a kind of juggling diplomacy with the questions at issue." From John Dewey, "Academic Freedom," in Jo Ann Boydston (Ed.), *John Dewey, The Middle Works: 1902-1903* (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press, 1976), Vol. 2, p. 60.

²⁴ One of these is Feinberg's response to a passage in Dewey's *Impressions of Soviet Russia*. Feinberg quotes Dewey as follows:

Nowhere else in the world is employment of it (propaganda) as a tool of control so constant, consistent, and systematic as in Russia at present. Indeed, it has taken on such importance and social dignity that the word propaganda hardly carries, in another social medium, the correct meaning. For we instinctively associate propaganda with the accomplishing of some specific ends, more or less private to a particular class or group and correspondingly concealed from others. But in Russia the propaganda is in behalf of a burning public faith. One may believe that the leaders are wholly mistaken in the object of their faith, but their sincerity is beyond question. To them the end for which propaganda is employed is not a private or even a class gain, but is the universal good of universal humanity. In consequence propaganda is education and education is propaganda. They are more than confounded; they are identical.

Feinberg, *Reason and Rhetoric*, pp. 207-208. Feinberg then says George S. Counts "expressed a similar sentiment a few years later," and quotes Counts to the effect that, if progressive education is to "emancipate itself," it must "become less frightened than it is today at the bogeys of imposition and indoctrination." Feinberg then remarks that "The appeal that the early phases of the Soviet experiment held for these educators

was as much an indication of their essentially managerial philosophy as it was an expression of their ideas on social justice." *Ibid.*, p. 208.

I am indebted to Paul C. Violas for pointing out that Feinberg errs in quoting Dewey to the effect that "They [education and propaganda] are more than confounded; they are identical." Dewey uses the term "identified," not "identical," which would make for a weaker case. Dewey easily could hold that the Russians could incorrectly make an identification even if the two are not identical. John Dewey, *Impressions of Soviet Russia* (New York: The New Republic, Inc., 1929), p. 54. This and another passage in Dewey's work (*Ibid.*, pp. 81-82.) deserve more extended treatment than I can give them here.

Soviet education at the community level did appeal to Dewey for a period of time, although even initially he distrusted Soviet ideology and was not certain about what might happen when the ideology came more directly to bear on communal practices. *Ibid.*, pp. 57-58, 113-114, 120-123, 127. The appeal is one thing; but, again, it is quite another to construe the quoted passage as saying that Dewey wanted or thought desirable an identification of education and propaganda. It hardly would be consistent with his other statements on education to say that its identification with propaganda, "had appeal." See, for example, John Dewey, *Character and Events*, ed. by Joseph Ratner (New York: Henry Holt, 1929), Vol. II, pp. 517-521, 587-591, 776-781; and his *The Problems of Men* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1946, pp. 37-38, 56, 82).

Feinberg and Henry Rosemont, Jr., use the same quotation (with the same error) in another work, introducing the quotation with: "Dewey's essentially laudatory description of Soviet education is perhaps indicative of his more general attitude about social control." At least equally, "Perhaps not," I think we can reply. Walter Feinberg and Henry Rosemont, Jr., *Work, Technology, and Education*, p. 74.

One other point must suffice for this brief paper. Feinberg writes:

One of the schools that Dewey reported on in the latter part of the book [*Schools of Tomorrow*] was P.S. 26 in Indianapolis. P.S. 26 was an all-black school in a poor black slum. In view of the condition of the families in the neighborhood and the poverty that Dewey described, the school was carrying on some worthwhile programs and was rightly included. Dewey mentioned that the school was located in "the crowded district of the city and has only colored pupils," and he observed that the school was not attempting to solve the race problem but that it was developing good citizens. If the experiment were to succeed, it would "mean a real step forward in solving the race problem." Yet the program that Dewey then described was strictly a vocational program, albeit an excellent one where much of the school and the neighborhood served as a shop for the students. At a time when much black labor was unskilled or employed as farmhands, a program of skill development was an advance forward. Nevertheless, black boys learned how to cook and black girls how to sew.

It might be said in the context of the purpose of the Deweys' book that it is unfair to criticize Dewey for merely reporting on what was a splendid vocational program without commenting on the social conditions that made being a cook one of the highest aspirations of a Negro child. Yet in view of the somewhat mild, but nevertheless serious, criticism [that the Deweys made elsewhere in *School and Society*] of Montessori, it would not have been too much to expect a comment on the implications of a strictly vocational program for black children. A more serious shadow is cast over Dewey's evaluation of the experiment as he suggests its greatest value to lie among the youngsters of Negro and immigrant parents. If it was realism that guided Dewey's at-

titude, it was realism of a peculiar kind, one that believed that the best way for a black man to cope with American society was to fit into it as best he could and as best it would allow. *Ibid.*, p. 110.

Let us look at the larger section from *Schools of Tomorrow*. I have added italics.

The supervising principal of public school No. 26 in Indianapolis is trying an experiment unlike any other known to us in an effort to make his plant a true school; that is, a place where the children of his neighborhood shall become healthy, happy, and competent both economically and socially, and where the connection of instruction with the life of the community shall be directly recognized both by children and parents. Mr. Valentine's school is located in the poor, crowded, colored district of the city and has only colored pupils. It is not an attempt to solve the "race question" nor yet an experiment suited only to colored people. **There is nothing in the school not entirely practical in any district where the children come from homes with limited resources and meager surroundings. A visitor, when leaving his school, cannot fail to wish that such ventures might be started in all our great cities—indeed in any community where people need to be aroused to a sense of their needs, including the fact that if they are to contribute to the best interests of the community, they must be taught how to earn a living, and how to use their resources for themselves and their neighbors both in leisure time and in working hours.** Mr. Valentine's school is a school for colored children **only in the sense** that the work has been arranged in relation to the conditions of the neighborhood; these modify the needs of the particular children who are the pupils. Yet the success of the experiment would mean a real step forward to solving the "race question" and peculiar problems of any immigrant district as well. Mr. Valentine is not interested in illustrating any theories on these points, but in making up for gaps in the home life of the pupils; giving them opportunities to prepare for a better future; in supplying plenty of healthy occupation and recreation; and in seeing to it that their schoolwork reacts at once to improve neighborhood conditions.

Mr. Valentine's school is really a social settlement for the neighborhood, but it has a decided advantage over the average settlement, for it comes in contact with all the children living within its district for a number of hours each day, while most settlements reach the children for only a few scattered hours each week. The school has a larger influence than most settlements because it is a public institution for which the people who use it are paying their share; they feel that their relation to it is a business one, not a matter of philanthropy. Because of this busi-

nesslike relation the school is able really to teach the doctrines of social welfare. In any settlement the work is always handicapped by the fact that the people who make use of it feel that they are receiving something for which they do not pay, that something is being done for them by people who are better off financially than they are. But giving a community facilities that it lacks for special classes and recreation through the public school of the district put the work on a different basis. The school is really the property of the people of the district; they feel that they are more or less responsible for what is done there. Any wider activities that a school may undertake are, to a certain extent, the work of the people themselves; they are simply making use of the school plant for their own needs.

John and Evelyn Dewey, *Schools of Tomorrow*, pp. 151-152. My italics. (Feinberg's reference is to p. 207 of this work, which I think must be incorrect.) One can say that Dewey refers especially to youngsters of Negro and immigrant parents; but is it not equally or more correct to say that he refers especially to "any district where the children come from homes with limited resources and meager surroundings"? And, does the fuller passage indicate that Dewey is unmoved by a deep concern for all such children?

I venture that Feinberg's account does not do justice to what Dewey's account and context provide. And I single out the passage for lengthy treatment because Feinberg, in four other publications, uses the passage in an almost identical manner, with even less context (although with reference back to *Reason and Rhetoric*) in at least three of them. See his "Progressive Education and Social Planning," pp. 495-496; Feinberg and Henry Rosemont, Jr., *Work, Technology, and Education*, p. 90; Feinberg's review, "John Dewey: Lectures in China, 1919-1920," published in *Philosophy East and West*, XXV, 4 (Winter 1975), p. 368; and his "Educational Equality Under Two Conflicting Models of Educational Development," *Theory and Society*, 2, 2 (Summer, 1975), p. 209, fn. 17.

The final chapter in the Deweys' *Schools of Tomorrow* (Chapter XI, "Democracy and Education") makes it patently clear that they are not in any sense advocating or accepting class or racist education from the purview of democracy. Silent (perhaps overly "tactful") they are about specific situations which would gall or infuriate us today, but they do not equivocate on democratic principles. Perhaps this is an appropriate place to give one of the more moving statements of what democratic principles required for all children: "What the best and wisest parent wants for his own child, that must the community want for all of its children. Any other ideal for our schools is narrow and unlovely; acted upon, it destroys our democracy." John Dewey, *The Child and the Curriculum* and *The School and Society*, with "Introduction" by Leonard Carmichael (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), p. 7.

²⁵ Feinberg, *Reason and Rhetoric*, pp. 52-53.

²⁶ Dewey, *The Problems of Men*, p. 36.