

*Deep Democracy: Community, Diversity, Transformation*

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In recent years, scholars of American philosophy have done considerable work to unearth, rediscover, reclaim, and otherwise bring to the attention of the philosophical community a great number of American thinkers whose works fell into obscurity for the usual kinds of reasons—they were women, they were African American or Native American, they taught at obscure little places (i.e. not Harvard), they didn't study or teach in philosophy departments, they didn't teach at all. Thanks to the scholarly work of people such as Charlene Haddock Seigfried, Leonard Harris, Scott Pratt, Johnny Washington, Marilyn Fischer, Eugenie Gatens-Robinson, Greg Moses, Anne Waters and Cornel West, the fabric of the history of American philosophy has been given a much more complex, richly textured and interesting weave. Their scholarship has, among other things, made it possible to teach the history of American philosophy as something other than a survey of the works of the “big three” (Peirce, James and Dewey). Now, such a course may well include figures such as W.E.B. DuBois, Frederick Douglass, Jane Addams, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Alain Locke, Martin Luther King Jr., and the ideas of governing institutions such as the Iroquois Confederacy.

*Deep Democracy*, by Judith Green, illustrates that this scholarship has also helped make it possible for contemporary American philosophers to draw upon the insights of these thinkers in order to investigate current philosophical

problems and questions. Yes, *Deep Democracy* carries out a sustained interaction with the work of troika member Dewey, in the course of exploring the nature of, obstacles to, and prospects for strengthening the fabric of democracy in the contemporary world. But Green also puts Dewey in conversation with Jane Addams (one of Dewey's actual philosophical companions), Alain Locke, Martin Luther King, Malcolm X and Cornel West. Green draws these thinkers together—and draws out the links between them—in order to develop her notion of “deep democracy.”

Not incidentally, Green also brings into the conversation thinkers entirely outside the American tradition—most notably Iris Young and Jurgen Habermas—in developing her “radical critical pragmatism” that “engage[s] with liberalism, communitarianism, postmodernism, critical theory, feminism, and cultural pluralism” (x). Indeed, one of the most striking things about *Deep Democracy* is its impressive grasp of a very large number of philosophers both inside and outside the American tradition.

Green notes that “each chapter of this book plays both critical and reconstructive roles in framing a philosophy of deep democracy” (8). This approach is more successful in some chapters than in others; at times, Green's critical approach overshadows and effectively obscures the reconstructive project. For instance, in the opening chapter, entitled “The Diverse Community or the Unoppressive City: Which Ideal for a Transformative Politics of Difference,” Green advocates the diverse community as the model for deepening democracy. However, she does so chiefly by sharply *critiquing* Iris Young's critique of the

notion of community and her proposed alternative, the “unoppressive city.”

While the critique of Young may well be apt, I do not find it an adequate vehicle for setting up Green’s positive project of developing a model of deep democracy.

In other chapters, I also lose Green’s voice in her long expositions of the theories of more unfamiliar thinkers. Green no doubt rightly worried about giving her readers enough grounding in these theorists’ ideas for us to be able to adequately assess the appropriateness of incorporating their ideas into her own model. Nevertheless, I often wished for stronger, or more frequent, articulations of Green’s democracy-deepening project, as I was being drawn through the concepts of a new thinker.

At still other points, Green focuses on arguing for including a figure in the pragmatist tradition—she makes this case for Martin Luther King, arguing that Cornel West ought to look to him, not Gramsci, to find the “theoretical inspiration [for his] prophetic pragmatism” (136). Again, the arguments may be entirely to the point, but they too often draw us away from a focus on what I take to be *her* point—to create a philosophical framework for deepening democracy.

I imagine that Green—very intentionally, and in the best spirit of pragmatism—has chosen to minimize the degree to which this vision is *her* vision, the extent to which *she* has created the story line into which these characters are fitted. But I wonder if she has not telescoped her own perspective too severely, creating a book that seems (to the less-than-attentive reader) to be a series of thinly-connected critical and explicative essays rather than a coherent, cumulative argument for an original model. I believe she is right that we need

the voices of these variously situated theorists if we are to develop a theory of deep democracy. But we also need to hear her voice clearly guiding us through that theory.

I also wonder if she hasn't simply packed too many agendas into a relatively compact space. She's critiquing postmodernist and critical theorist conceptions of the project of democracy; introducing and explicating the projects of lesser known figures in American philosophy (and arguing for their inclusion in the pragmatist tradition); *and* weaving together an original model for a democracy that moves beyond the level of formal institutions to ground and inform the real community-building efforts of real individuals and groups.

This last agenda deserves explicit comment. Green is clearly genuinely interested in creating democratic theory that both springs from and returns to the realm of concrete problems—she aims to write “public philosophy” (xiv). Divorced from this realm, Dewey believed that philosophy had lost its moorings; Green clearly agrees. She mentions—and sometimes discusses at some length—a variety of crises in, challenges to, and successes in, building deeply democratic communities. These examples range in scope from her own participation in a neighborhood project to develop a community vision statement, to the World Bank's decision to move to a lending policy that is allegedly more participatory, experimental, and attuned to environmental challenges. As even these two illustrations suggest, she wishes for her model of deep democracy to be able to address a very broad range of problems and challenges, on both the micro and macro level. This, again, is a strength and weakness of the book. I appreciate her

acknowledgement of the enormous number of contexts in which democracy building can and must go on—however, I am left feeling frustrated at the short shrift that each context or situation is given.

Despite that caveat, I wish Green had begun her book where she ended it—with these concrete “symptoms and causes” of “problems in the public square,” and then followed this with her descriptions of three democracy-building “solutions” in which she participated while living in Seattle. These accounts give her reader a rich understanding of the project of deep democracy “on the ground,” and a real sense of the obstacles to its development. Here are the Deweyan “problem situations” out of which useful theory can spring. Beginning here would have grounded Green’s theoretical explorations, and given her readers a set of criteria by which to measure the adequacy of her resultant model of deep democracy for ourselves: “Would it have addressed the problems encountered in *that* concrete circumstance? Would it have enabled *this* group to move its democracy building project to the next level?”