

# John Dewey's Critique of Classical Liberalism

## John Dewey'in Klasik Liberalizm Eleştirisi

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### Abstract

This study explores John Dewey's critique of classical liberalism, particularly its conception of the individual, and examines his effort to reconstruct liberalism in response to the social, political, and economic challenges of the early 20th century. During this period, the Western world, which had been industrializing for the last two hundred years, encountered unprecedented social, political and economic problems. During this period, rapid industrialization, urban migration, and the emergence of class struggles exposed the limitations of classical liberalism. Liberalism faced serious criticism from both inside and outside. While some thinkers proposed alternative models to liberalism, other sought to reinterpret liberalism in line with modern conditions, aiming to preserve its core values

### Özet

Bu çalışma, John Dewey'in klasik liberalizmi yeniden yapılandırma çabasını ele almakta ve klasik liberalizmin birey anlayışına yönelik eleştirisine odaklanmaktadır. 20. yüzyıla gelindiğinde, son iki yüz yıldır sanayileşen Batı dünyası daha önce görülmemiş toplumsal, politik ve ekonomik sorunlarla karşılaşmıştır. Artan nüfus, kırsaldan şehirlere göç, yeni bir toplumsal sorun olarak ortaya çıkan sınıf mücadelesi klasik liberalizmin sınırlılıklarını ortaya çıkarmış, liberalizm hem içeriden hem de dışarıdan ciddi eleştirilerle karşılaşmıştır. Bazı düşünürler liberalizme alternatif modeller önerirken diğerleri liberalizmi 20. yüzyılın gerekliliklerinden hareketle yeniden yorumlamıştır. İkinci grupta yer alan John Dewey, tüm eksikliklerine rağmen insanlığın en büyük kazanım-

of individuality and freedom while addressing its flaws. Dewey, who was in the second group, aimed to reconstruct liberalism, which he saw as one of humanity's greatest achievements despite all its shortcomings, in accordance with the requirements of the age. Dewey's reconstruction attempt unfolds in two steps: The first step includes a critical analysis of classical liberalism and the identification of the elements that render it ineffective. The second step is the construction of a new liberalism that leaves the shortcomings of classical liberalism behind, but maintains its emphasis on individuality and freedom. This study touches upon Dewey's proposed new liberalism, but mainly focuses on his critique of classical liberalism. Firstly, Dewey reveals that classical liberalism creates an artificial opposition between the individual and society, as well as, between freedom and political authority, showing that these artificial dualisms undermine liberalism's capacity to address contemporary social issues. These false oppositions are a faulty conclusion reached by reasoning, based on false premises. Therefore, it is necessary to go deeper to identify the false premises that cause this faulty conclusion. For Dewey, the most fundamental problem of classical liberalism is an abstract understanding of the individual, disconnected from social

larından biri olarak gördüğü liberalizmi, çağın gerekliliklerine uygun bir biçimde yeniden yapılandırmayı amaçlar. Dewey'nin yeniden yapılandırma girişimi iki basamaktan oluşur: İlk basamak, klasik liberalizmin eleştirel bir analizini ve onu etkisiz kılan unsurların saptanmasını içerir. İkinci basamak ise klasik liberalizmin eksiklerini geride bırakan ancak bireycilik ve özgürlük vurgusunu koruyan yeni bir liberalizmin inşasıdır. Bu çalışma Dewey'nin önerdiği yeni liberalizme değinmekle birlikte esas olarak onun klasik liberalizm eleştirisine odaklanır. Dewey öncelikle, klasik liberalizmin birey ile toplum arasında ve özgürlük ile siyasi otorite arasında yapay bir karşıtlık yarattığını ortaya koyar ve bu sahte karşıtlıkların liberalizmin sorun çözme gücünü zayıflattığını gösterir. Bu sahte karşıtlıklar yanlış öncüllerden hareket eden bir akıl yürütmenin ulaştığı hatalı bir sonuçtur. Bu nedenle daha derine inmek ve bu hatalı sonuca neden olan hatalı öncülleri saptamak gerekmektedir. Dewey için klasik liberalizmin en temel sorunu toplumsal bağlam ve ilişkilerden kopuk, soyut bir birey anlayışıdır. Bu birey anlayışı 18. yüzyıl liberal düşüncesinden miras alınan felsefi bir idealdir ve tarihsel, psikolojik ve sosyolojik dayanaklardan yoksundur. John Locke ve onu takip eden gelenek, bireyi toplumsal baskılar ve politik zor-

context and relations. This understanding of the individual is a philosophical ideal inherited from 18th century liberal thought and lacks historical, psychological and sociological foundations. John Locke and the tradition that followed him developed an understanding of individuality that has no empirical equivalent in order to protect the individual against social pressures and political coercion; however, the individualism of classical liberalism has led to new forms of oppression over time. This article aims to reveal the steps John Dewey followed in criticizing classical liberalism and the logical relationship between these steps.

**Keywords:** Pragmatism, Liberalism, Liberal Democracy, Individualism, Reconstruction.

lamalar karşısında koruyabilmek için empirik karşılığı olmayan bir bireycilik anlayışı geliştirmiştir; ancak klasik liberalizmin bireyciliği zamanla yeni tahakküm biçimlerine yol açmıştır. Bu makale John Dewey'nin klasik liberalizmi eleştirirken izlediği adımları ve bu adımlar arasındaki mantıksal ilişkiyi ortaya koymayı amaçlamaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Pragmatizm, Liberalizm, Liberal Demokrasi, Bireycilik, Yeniden yapılandırma

## The Crisis of Classical Liberalism

The idea of liberal democracy, largely developed in Britain, played an important role in America's independence. The American Constitution was created based on the classical liberal theory put forward by John Locke. For immigrants, intellectuals and politicians, the American experience was seen as a new beginning. The "New World" quickly became a myth for Europeans, and despite the dangers of crossing the ocean and the difficulties of colonial life, millions of people immigrated to America to escape Europe's oppressive traditions and make a new start (Campbell, 1996, p. 2). Americans brought their languages, laws, institutions, moral beliefs and religions from Europe; but they adapted them to the new conditions they encountered (Dewey, LW 2, p.18-19). Thus, many traditions and beliefs that were not questioned in Europe were brought into question in America. However, the liberal optimism that played an important role in America's foundation quickly gave way to a suspicion of democracy. The fact that the masses turned to anti-democratic practices after every difficulty they encountered and sought a single-man leadership that would deprive them of their freedom worried and disappointed pioneers like Jefferson. The founders, who were suspicious of majority rule, fearing that America would resemble the European societies from which it emerged, created a political model that absolutized basic rights and freedoms, saw law as a structure that protected these absolutes, and, from this point on, organized political institutions and the relationships between these institutions and individuals:

Early republicans were obliged even in their own time to note that general conditions, such as are summed up under the name of culture, had a good deal to do with political institutions. For they held that oppressions of state and church had exercised a corrupting influence upon human nature, so that the original impulse to liberty had either been lost or warped out of shape. This was a virtual admission that surrounding conditions may be stronger than native tendencies. It proved a degree of plasticity in human nature that required exercise of continual solicitude —expressed in the saying that eternal vigilance is the

price of liberty. The Founding Fathers were aware that love of power is a trait of human nature, so strong a one that definite barriers had to be erected to keep persons who get into positions of official authority from encroachments that undermine free institutions. Admission that men may be brought by long habit to hug their chains implies a belief that second or acquired nature is stronger than original nature. (Dewey, 1939, p. 6-7).

In this way, the founding fathers aimed to prevent the new republic from resembling the monarchies in Europe. They assumed that they had developed a mechanism that would solve any political problem that might be encountered later. However, the American political system, based on classical liberalism, proved inadequate in solving the new problems faced by America, which was rapidly industrializing, moving away from an agricultural economy in the first half of the 19th century. Gone were the days when a large portion of the population lived a sedentary life in rural areas. Different groups of people who had previously lived isolated lives without much contact with each other began to live together in large cities. In addition, slavery and other oppressive social practices that had found a place in American history, and the class injustices that became evident within urban life, were brought into question. European states that faced similar problems, but could not develop the tools to solve them, were dragged into serious internal turmoil, including the first World War. All these developments caused the principles of the American political system and liberal democracy to be opened to discussion. During this period, two tendencies such as government by experts<sup>1</sup> and strict constitutionalism<sup>2</sup> emerged against classical liberalism, which was not able to solve the new problems that emerged in the rapidly industrializing world. Although these approaches started from different places, they agreed on the inadequacy of the current system.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, in his work *Public Opinion*, Walter Lippmann developed an approach that argued that the public was not capable of understanding complex and specialized issues, and therefore experts should be present in the administration, and that the role of the public could not go beyond voting at certain intervals.

<sup>2</sup> Those who argue that new bureaucratic institutions should be established that will strictly implement the articles in the Constitution without interpreting them.

In opposition to models that reject classical liberalism, a reformist approach had emerged and aimed to reconstruct classical liberalism by critically analysing it. Advocates of rule by experts or strict constitutionalism point to the majority's incompetence, resulting in problems with democracy, as the reason for the inadequacies of the current system. John Dewey, who was in the reformist camp, thought that despite all its shortcomings, classical liberalism, as the basis of modern democracy, was the most successful political system ever developed, when compared to other political systems. He believed that the attack against classical liberalism had the potential to destroy democracy which was the crowning achievement of humanity. As a result of this, Dewey aimed to reconstruct classical liberalism in order to maintain the democratic system of government. However, to achieve that, he dismantled and rebuilt liberalism, redefining democracy. Dewey argued that the concept of democracy should be redefined to include people's collective thinking and action, restructuring the political system in a way that strengthens participatory democracy. Therefore, what is needed, according to him, is not technical interventions that will reduce the influence of ordinary people, but a more inclusive restructuring of democracy according to the needs of the 20th century; because democracy is not simply a political system, but a tool and method for establishing and maintaining the most appropriate way of life for human beings:

Universal suffrage, recurring elections, responsibility of those who are in political power to the voters, and the other factors of democratic government are means that have been found expedient for realizing democracy as a truly human way of living (Dewey, LW 11, p. 218).

For Dewey, democracy was an ethical ideal, the only way to realize man's most appropriate form of social existence. However, many thinkers considered democracy only as a political system:

... for a long period, we acted as if our democracy were something that perpetuated itself automatically; as if our ancestors had succeeded in setting up a machine that solved the problem of perpetual motion in politics. We acted as if democracy were something that took place mainly at Washington and Albany

—or some other state capital—under the impetus of what happened when men and women went to the polls once a year or so—which is a somewhat extreme way of saying that we have had the habit of thinking of democracy as a kind of political mechanism that will work as long as citizens were reasonably faithful in performing political duties (Dewey, LW 14, p. 225).

The liberal ideals and values that form the basis of American institutions and social practices are concepts that emerged, at a certain point in history, and were primarily concerned with solving the problems of that period. When the concepts central to classical liberalism, such as freedom and individualism, are treated as timeless and unchangeable, these concepts become rigid and lose their validity in the face of evolving cultural, social, political, economic, and technological conditions. Dewey saw liberal ideals and moral and political principles as intellectual tools designed to address specific historical forms of social and political pressures. However, this does not mean that all philosophical theories are merely contextual and do not have universal value. Although societies are different, there are certain elements in human nature that transcend societies, times, and cultures. These elements cause similar problems in every society. Therefore, the determinations and solutions to the problems of being human in a political theory are universal. However, these universal qualities must be re-evaluated in every period and their meaning must be understood in the current situation. Thus, Dewey proposed a historical method to identify the problems of classical liberalism and the liberal democracy that is based on it. In order to understand the crisis of American democracy, he first looked at American history. According to Dewey, the partial success achieved by America in the 19th century was not solely due to the planned and programmed implementation of the classical liberalism imported from England for 150 years. It would not be right to attribute the success of the American experience entirely to classical liberalism. This success was largely due to a series of coincidental reasons:

A more sober view of history discloses that it took a very fortunate conjunction of events to bring about the rapid spread and seemingly complete victory of

democracy during the nineteenth century. The conclusion to be drawn is not the depressing one that it is now in danger of destruction because of an unfavorable conjunction of events. The conclusion is that what was won in a more or less external and accidental manner must now be achieved and sustained by deliberate and intelligent endeavour (Dewey, 1939, p. 173).

Thus, Dewey suggested, first of all, to investigate the elements that make classical liberalism inadequate in solving problems and to take steps to eliminate the identified deficiencies. This is a call for reconstruction. The first step in reconstructing liberal democracy is to make a historical analysis, examining the philosophical and scientific assumptions behind it.

After thousands of years of oppressive rule, liberal thinkers had developed a rather simple and shallow political theory, in order to put humanity on the path of freedom. Classical liberalism conceived the individual as a being one who pursues his own interests, determining his own good in isolation from other individuals, and argued that individual freedom and authority are incompatible with each other. According to Lockean classical liberal theory, the role of the government was to prevent individuals from harming each other, to ensure the right to property, and to protect society from external threats. Apart from these duties, the state should stay out of individuals' lives and allow them to live as they freely choose. The goal of liberalism was to eliminate situations that would prevent individuals from pursuing their own desires and realizing their full potential. At the core of classical liberal democracy was the concept of negative liberty. Here, liberty was the "freedom from external impediments". As a result, law has been defined as a mechanism that protects individual freedom against other individuals and political authority. However, according to Dewey, this anthropology was not a concrete and scientifically supported anthropology; Darwin's theory of evolution has shown that humans are social organisms and develop their capacities within society; liberal anthropology, which was created before Darwin, has neglected the social and cultural dimensions of human nature, based on the claim that individuality and society contradict each other. Thus, they have reduced democracy to having equal



rights and voting. This liberal model achieved partial success until the 20th century, but has come to a deadlock, in the face of new and more complex problems.

For Dewey, the past where random interventions were developed based on unfounded anthropological dogmatic theories was over: “We cannot resist the idea that human nature, when left to itself and freed from some forced external connections, will create successfully functioning democratic institutions” (Dewey, 1939, p. 105). What needs to be done is to restructure liberalism, which has survived until now with the help of a series of random historical events and fortunes, based on realistic, concrete and scientific foundations, transforming it into a program that intelligently directs social life. Liberalism as a political theory has not yet exhausted itself; on the contrary, despite its extremely inadequate foundation, it has achieved significant successes that are unprecedented in history. Therefore, the possibilities of liberalism and democracy, which is almost a natural extension of it, need to be explored. This requires a major philosophical initiative that goes beyond partial administrative interventions.

## **Fundamental Problems of Classical Liberalism**

According to Dewey, the fundamental problem of classical liberalism was the dogmatization of a type of individual that does not exist. As a result of this false philosophical anthropology, the individual-society relationship has been incorrectly established. First, the atomized individual understanding that is the basis of liberalism should be abandoned and a new approach that includes the social and cultural dimensions of human individuality should be created:

The subject matter which follows is that of a drama in three acts, of which the last is the unfinished one now being enacted in which we, now living, are the participants. The first act, as far as it is possible to tell its condensed story, is that of a one-sided simplification of human nature which was used to promote and justify the new political movement. The second act is that of the reaction against the theory and the practices connected with it, on the ground that it was

the forerunner of moral and social anarchy, the cause of dissolution of the ties of cohesion that bind human beings together in organic union. The third act, now playing, is that of recovery of the moral significance of the connection of human nature and democracy, now stated in concrete terms of existing conditions and freed from the one-sided exaggerations of the earlier statement. (Dewey, 1939, p. 103).

There is also an ethical dimension to reconsidering human nature. It will also shed light on the question of what kind of a being a human is and what is good for him. The good of the individual will form the general framework of the answer to the question of “what is good for society?” Dewey determined that there was a direct connection between the atomistic individual-based democracy concept and empiricism. Empiricists rejected all kinds of innate absolute ideas and associated knowledge with experience and the senses. This approach brought with it some political consequences. Institutions and practices whose truth and necessity were beyond doubt on traditional and theological grounds, now lost their objectivity. This idea triggered the Enlightenment movement. The idea that it was the duty of individuals to use their own minds freely in the public sphere began to spread. For example, Kant defined Enlightenment as an effort to “get rid of the immaturity that man has fallen into through his own fault” and invited everyone to “have the courage to use his mind” (Kant, 2007, p. 17).

Although Dewey found the contribution of empiricism to the Enlightenment positive, he thought that the individual understanding created from empiricism prevented democracy from being placed on a consistent philosophical basis: “Since individualism, traditionally associated with democracy, has made equality quantitative, individuality has become something external and mechanical instead of unique and qualitative” (Dewey, MW 11, p. 53). With the acceptance of individuality as a given, society has been defined simply as a collection of individuals. With society being considered as a numerical multitude, liberal democracy has been perceived as an administrative system based on the decision of the majority. In addition, the relationship of democracy with culture and social institutions has been largely ignored.

Classical liberals defined individuality as “a given” in order to save the individual from the oppression of tradition, political authority and religion and to secure individual freedom. John Locke, who defended constitutional liberalism, Mill, who saw individuality as the highest value, and Smith, who defended the laissez-faire approach in economics, discussed how a state that protected social order without restricting the freedom of the individual could be possible. Since liberalism emerged in a period when the state was the most visible obstacle to freedom, its most fundamental characteristic was its sceptical attitude towards the power of the government (Damico, 1978, p. 68). Classical liberals thought that in a society where the state was as small as possible and a free-market economy was accepted, people were free to pursue what they wanted and could freely display their talents and capacities. Liberals, who saw the individual, the government and the state as opposites, primarily wanted to secure individual freedom and tried to do this in two different ways. The first of these, as we will see in Locke, was the idea of a social contract. Through the concept of contract, Locke defined the rights of the individual against political authority, the legitimacy and limits of the power that political authority could exercise over the individual. In this way, he both ensured the priority of the individual against political authority and associated the legitimacy of the government with the consent of each individual. Dewey emphasized that classical liberals assume a pre-political society, in which they define individuals as a mere multitude, and as a result the state becomes an artificial institution positioned against the individual (Dewey, EW 1, p. 231). This means that classical liberalism is based on a process that never actually happened.

Another important advocate of liberalism, J. S. Mill, based liberalism not on the social contract but on utilitarianism, and placed the liberal principles we discussed above in a new context. He advocated freedom in the economy in partnership with Adam Smith, and by narrowing the limits of the state’s authority, he left the solutions to social problems largely to the initiative of individuals. For example, he argued that the state should leave this to individuals, even though it could solve some economic problems

faster. He thought that individuals should solve their own problems in order to realize their mental development, and emphasized that any new power added to the powers of the government under the pretext of solving problems would be a great mistake (Mill, 1951, p. 200-23). As a result, Mill reinforced the negative approach to the state, argued that individuals could continue their lives in the direction they wanted in the presence of limited government and the free market, and he agreed with Locke and Smith on this point. Dewey found liberals' efforts to secure individual freedom and individual autonomy correct, but he thought that the method they used to achieve this had no equivalent in the 20th century. From this point of view, he tried to reconstruct liberalism by reanalysing concepts such as individual, community, government and democracy. He did not remain only within political theory, but aimed to establish liberalism on a pragmatic basis, based on his understanding of human nature, intelligence and scientific method.

According to Dewey, classical liberalism and democracy was a product of the empiricist epistemology, which produced Cartesian dualism in a different way. Empiricists defined the mind as a passive faculty that exists independently of the external world and is shaped in the light of data from the senses. In this approach, the mind was placed in a passive and receptive position. Based on empiricist epistemology and understanding of mind, liberals defined the individual as an entity that already exists before sociality, and with the idea of a social contract, the government was defined as a structure that restricts the freedom of the individual. Dewey, developed a pragmatic theory of mind and defined the mind as a faculty that inherently tends to establish relationships with its environment. Thus, the individual has become a being that is shaped within the interaction with its environment, and whose mental capacities are revealed within sociality. With the acceptance that the mental powers of the individual are revealed through interaction in society, the opposition between the individual and the community has disappeared, and these two have become two elements that complement each other. Dewey presented his understanding of liberalism as the "New Liberalism."

## The New Individualism

Dewey argued that liberalism, which classical liberals based on the opposition between the individual and the government, should be revised and that many problems concerning society should be solved at the public level. Dewey thought that the claim put forward by classical liberals, that people would reach the best possible life and realize their own good when left to their own devices, was historically falsified. He saw that, especially with the dominance of the free market economy, the masses came under the control of a small number of companies that concentrated on capital. Individuals, whose freedom was restricted and enslaved by kings and theocratic governments in previous centuries, were taken under control by those who held economic power in this new situation, where state intervention was reduced to a minimum. Equality remained only within legal documentation, and in real life, the masses suffered a great loss of freedom. For Dewey, the approach that people would be equally free if the same legal regulations were applied equally to everyone, regardless of differences arising from education and property ownership, is factually incorrect. (Dewey, LW 3, p. 100- 01).

Dewey points out that classical liberalism, whose primary goal is individual freedom, paradoxically opened the way to the loss of freedom. He argued that equality before the law alone would not provide real equality, and that the government should provide equal opportunities for all individuals in society by making the necessary regulations. The falsely constructed opposition between the individual and the government, in classical liberalism, had led to a new injustice with 20th century capitalism and was one of the biggest problems to be overcome:

Individualism is one of the concepts that suffers from ambiguity in daily use. It is used in many meanings, from a behavior based on selfishness to difference and uniqueness. It can easily be said that excessive individualism is the greatest scourge that has befallen American civilization, and that our lack of true individuality is our greatest deficiency. (Dewey, MW 13, p. 289).

According to Dewey, many of the problems of modern liberal societies are due to a number of false assumptions embedded in the old individual-

ism. The first of these is the psychological assumption that individuality is an inherent, self-evident trait (Dewey, LW 11, p. 30). The second is the political assumption that pre-social individuals have natural rights. The third is the economic assumption that “individuals’ pursuit of their own individual interests will lead to social progress and will most effectively meet the needs of others, thus increasing the general happiness.” Dewey thinks that these three assumptions can no longer be defended; however, he accepts the historical importance of individualism inherited from the past. Old-style individualism fulfilled an important task in the conditions in which it emerged, and revealed that religious and political authorities, which had had serious power over individuals for thousands of years, were based on arbitrariness and had no legitimate basis. Liberalism did not stop there; it ensured that the principles of freedom of thought and expression, which would enable individuals to fully reveal their capacities, found a response in social life. However, after a while, this understanding fell behind contemporary developments and turned into one of the fixed and unchanging beliefs that he tragically opposed because of the definition of the individual that lacked historical depth and context (Damico, 1978: 71). For Dewey, liberalism, which was on the side of moral progress in the 18th and early 19th centuries, became a morally reactionary doctrine in the 20th century. This shift exemplifies how what benefits us today may become detrimental in the future.

After the 1920s, countries that had been rapidly industrializing for the last hundred years faced serious crises, and many thinkers thought that the economic and social problems affecting the masses were caused by liberalism based on the free market and atomistic individuals. Dewey agreed with these criticisms and thought that the old, outdated individualism defined on the basis of individual profit and enterprise prevented the creation of a true individualism (Stuhr, 2002, p. 94):

It’s not too much to say that the whole significance of the older individualism has now shrunk to pecuniary scale and measure. The virtues that are supposed to attend rugged individualism may be vocally proclaimed, but it takes no great

insight to see that what is cherished is measured by its connection with those activities that make for success in business, conduct, or personal gain. (Dewey, LW 5, p. 84-85).

With the birth of liberalism, a socio-political philosophy that questioned all kinds of authority began to rise, and as a result, liberals who identified themselves with *Laissez-faire* individualism gained power. However, this liberalism, which condemned authority to only providing social order, led to new forms of inequality starting in the 19th century (Hoy, 1998, p. 82). Dewey wanted to show that individualism, which legitimized itself with ethical ideals such as freedom and happiness and opposed established authority, had become a replica of the oppressive mechanism it once opposed. He thought that a new liberalism would only be possible by eliminating this dogmatic aspect of classical liberalism.

The old liberalism based itself on absolute concepts that had no empirical equivalent, and in common with previous worldviews, reduced life to a series of unchanging relationship forms. However, according to Dewey, life is a state of flux; family, church, school, science, art and similar institutions have undergone constant transformation throughout history under the pressure of economic, political and environmental conditions. Dewey thought that the duty of humanity was to determine the direction of life's flow, which he defined as a constant search for harmony and dynamism, and stated that this direction should coincide with the basic principles of life (Dewey, LW 11, p.41).

## Conclusion

For Dewey, the primary purpose of political systems is to overcome the challenges that societies encounter. However, this process must adhere to an ethical ideal: the good of the individual lies in realizing their full potential. Following this ideal, political systems should not restrict individuals' opportunities for self-realization while attempting to solve societal problems. In the 17th and 18th centuries, liberalism aimed to liberate people from political and ideological oppression, and it achieved partial success.

However, by the early 20th century, liberalism had evolved into a structure that promoted new forms of inequality and injustice, thus beginning to resemble the authoritarian systems it once criticized. This was due to the transformation of social and economic conditions. The needs and challenges of the 18th century gave way to new demands over time, but liberalism failed to adapt, losing its capacity to solve problems. Gradually, it became rigid and dogmatic, resembling the ideologies it had originally opposed. Dewey recognized that liberalism was on a trajectory toward becoming a failed political system and foresaw that, without restructuring, it would further entrench social inequalities and injustices. In such a scenario, rival ideologies promoting anti-individualism and blind collectivism could rise to power and potentially replace liberalism. In the face of these risks, Dewey believed that the core values of liberalism—its focus on individualism and freedom—were too valuable to abandon. Thus, he deemed it necessary to reconstruct liberalism, beginning with a critical assessment of its current problems.

Dewey diagnosed the shortcomings of the old liberalism, which viewed the individual and the community, freedom and political authority, as two opposing extremes, and argued that it needed to be redefined. In his liberalism, he aimed to eliminate the opposition between the individual and the powers that restrict his freedom, and to show that the individual and the community, individual freedom and authority are actually parts of the same whole. For Dewey, individuality is something that each member of society will realize first and foremost on his own; however, since people do not live alone but in relationships with other people and institutions, these continuously affect the process of individual self-development. Individuals exist and develop in small communities within society; therefore, the context of the individual search for good is in the community. With this approach, Dewey added an ethical and social dimension to early liberalism, which argued that individuality would emerge when external obstacles were removed and natural rights were secured. The task of politics became diversified and difficult by considering individuality as something that was



acquired: Creating a positive form of interaction between the individual and his/her environment became one of the most important goals.

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