Article

Dewey's Political Technology from an Anthropological Perspective

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Abstract

This article explores the possibility that John Dewey's silence about which democratic means are needed to achieve democratic ends, while confusing, makes greater sense if we appreciate the notion of political technology from an anthropological perspective. Michael Eldridge relates the exchange between John Herman Randall, Jr. and Dewey in which Dewey concedes "that I have done little or nothing in this direction [of outlining what constitutes adequate political technology, but that] does not detract from my recognition that in the concrete the invention of such a technology is the heart of the problem of intelligent action in political matters." Dewey's concession could be interpreted as an admission that he was unqualified to identify political machinery or institutions suitable for realizing his vision of democracy as a way of life. Not being able to specify adequate means to achieve lofty democratic ends is not problematic, though, if we appreciate the roots of Dewey's work (especially *Human Nature and Conduct*) in the anthropological writings of Immanuel Kant and Franz Boas. Experience reflects a myriad of social and cultural conditions such that specifying explicit means to structure that experience risks stymieing the organic development of political practice. When pressured to operationalize political technology, Dewey chose the appropriately open-ended and, at times, frustratingly vague means of education and growth. In short, Dewey did not want his ambitious democratic vision to outstrip the possibilities of practice, so he left the task of specifying exact political technology (or which democratic means are best suited to achieve democratic ends) unfinished.

> I believe that education is the fundamental method of social progress and reform.
>
> —John Dewey[1]

> In the broadest sense, it [Dewey's experimentalism] is the experimentalism of the anthropologist, of the student of human institutions and cultures, impressed by the fundamental role of habit in men and societies and by the manner in which those habits are altered and changed.
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> —John Herman Randall, Jr.[2]

This article explores the possibility that John Dewey's silence on the matter of which democratic means are needed to achieve democratic ends, while confusing, makes greater sense if we appreciate the notion of political technology from an anthropological perspective. The late Michael Eldridge related the exchange between John Herman Randall, Jr. and Dewey in which Dewey concedes "that I have done little or nothing in this direction [of outlining what constitutes adequate political technology, but that] does not detract from my recognition that in the concrete the invention of such a technology is the heart of the problem of intelligent action in political matters."[3]

Dewey's concession could be interpreted as an admission that he was unqualified to identify political machinery or institutions suitable for his vision of democracy as a way of life. Not being able to specify adequate means to achieve lofty democratic ends is not problematic though, if we appreciate the roots of Dewey's work (especially *Human Nature and Conduct*) in the anthropological writings of Immanuel Kant and Franz Boas. Experience reflects a myriad of social and cultural conditions such that specifying explicit means to structure that experience risks stymieing the organic development of political practice. When pressured to operationalize political technology, Dewey chose the appropriately open-ended—and, at times, frustratingly vague—means of education and growth. In short, he did not want his ambitious democratic vision to outstrip the possibilities of practice, so he left the task of specifying exact political technology (or which democratic means are best suited to achieve democratic ends) unfinished. The importance of addressing this issue arises from the fact that much of the secondary literature on Deweyan democracy misconstrues Dewey's vagueness about exact political technology as a weakness of his political philosophy, when it is—I argue—its strength.

This article is organized into four sections. In the first, I summarize Eldridge's treatment of Dewey's political technology as well as some work of his critics. These critics contend that either Dewey specified the wrong democratic means to achieve democratic ends or he was too agnostic about settling on what technology was required in advance of changing cultural and political conditions. The second section imagines that political technology is limited to institutions. Dewey's silence can then be interpreted as an attempt to maintain a sufficiently flexible institutional agenda. In the third section, it is argued that the institutionalist perspective proves incomplete and, therefore, needs to be supplemented with a more robust account. To this end, I propose that Dewey's failure to specify adequate political technology makes more sense if appreciated anthropologically, reflecting the importance Eldridge affords the notion of cultural instrumentalism and that Dewey, himself, gave to the concept of culture. The article concludes with some implications of my analysis for Dewey scholarship, generally, including a call for a closer study of the late Michael Eldridge's impressive scholarly work on Dewey's political technology, and grassroots political activism.

Dewey and the Problem of Political Technology

The essay "Democratic Ends Need Democratic Means for Their Realization" demonstrates how Dewey's conceptualization of the means-end relationship operates in a political context.[4] Originally Dewey presented it as an address to the Committee for Cultural Freedom at the outset of the Second World War and prior to U.S. involvement (1939, Germany had just invaded Poland). In the work, he expressed concern about the argument, prevalent among elites during the 1930s, that promoting democracy will at times require the use of non-democratic means or methods, such as violence, propaganda and torture, in order to secure democratic ends. Dewey noted that the problem of "repression of cultural freedom" in Germany, Japan and Italy cannot solely be due to their fascist political systems, but is symptomatic of defects in the wider culture. Likewise, he claimed that "our chief problems are those within our own culture."[5] He decried the use of undemocratic means (e.g., violence, totalitarian rule) for the sake of securing democratic ends. In other words, the ends do not always justify the means (despite the Jesuit maxim), and in fact noxious means can potentially poison perfectly acceptable ends. So, "resort to military force," he claims, is unjustified in promoting democracy. Instead, we should employ "democratic methods, methods of consultation, persuasion, negotiation, cooperative intelligence."[6] Moreover, the scope of democratic transformation should not be restricted to explicitly political arrangements, but ought to extend to "industry, education—or culture generally"—that is, to the whole of civil society.

Dewey's definition of democracy is alive with melioristic possibilities, or opportunities to unleash human potential. In the same year, but in a different address entitled "Creative Democracy—The Task before Us," he writes, "Democracy is a way of life controlled by a working faith in the possibilities of human nature."[7] If democracy cannot be attained by undemocratic means, then what means, methods and instruments are available to the democrat? What did Dewey mean by intelligent democratic methods? A short answer is technology that is adequate to achieve democratic ends.

Some possible candidates for what might count as adequate political technology are as follows:

1. Deliberative forums, such as town hall meetings and citizen assemblies;
2. Campaign finance reform or efforts to revise current laws that govern how money is contributed to and used by political action groups, political parties and candidates;
3. Transparent and accountable regulatory institutions or independent bodies that stop corruption and ensure proper checks and balances in a system of fair governance; and
4. Efforts to expand civic education and extend voting rights to marginalized or disempowered individuals and groups.

Dewey comes closest to advocating for the first candidate (and to a weaker extent the last three) in *The Public and Its Problems*. First, he distinguishes between political democracy and the social idea of democracy: "We have had occasion to refer in passing to the distinction between democracy as a social idea and political democracy as a system of government. The two are, of course, connected. The idea remains barren and empty save as it is incarnated in human relationships. Yet in discussion they may be distinguished."[8] Next, he defines political democracy as "those traditional political institutions" which include "general suffrage, elected representatives [and] majority rule."[9] Dewey connects the idea of representative democracy and the role of experts and government officials to political technology associated with citizen deliberation. Although Dewey never employs the term *deliberation* in the way deliberative democrats do today, he wields synonyms such as *inquiry*, *dialogue,* and *communication* to describe how citizens enrich democratic practice through discussion, not simply by voting in elections.[10] In *The Public and Its Problems*, he writes, "Systematic and continuous inquiry . . . and its results are but tools after all. Their final actuality is accomplished in face-to-face relationships by means of direct give and take. Logic in its fulfilment recurs to the primitive sense of the word: dialogue."[11] For Dewey, dialogue is the engine for democratic self-governance, the public ruling itself, since it ensures that government policies and actions may be criticized, petitioned, and eventually changed through citizen action. This, he insists, maximizes government accountability and minimizes the extent to which citizens will blindly follow state officials. Of course, Dewey acknowledges that officials are important, given their policy expertise and the daunting complexity of political problems. Ultimately, though, the idea of democracy should outstrip the state machinery, radiating into all aspects of life: "The idea of democracy is a wider and fuller idea than can be exemplified in the state at its best. To be realized it must affect all modes of human association, the family, the school, industry, religion."[12]

To make this point more clearly, Dewey abstains from dictating the requisite democratic technology in terms of specific political proposals, reforms, institutions, or practices. All we know is that adequate technology indicates political means that are properly adapted to the democratic end: namely, citizens realizing as fully as possible their individual and collective capacities ("the possibilities of human nature"). So, democratic transformation demands diligence and creativity, "the slow day by day adoption and contagious diffusion in every phase of our common life of methods that are identical with the ends to be reached."[13] Unfortunately, Dewey does not elaborate further.

Dewey's vagueness about the exact content of intelligent democratic means or political technology occupies Michael Eldridge's attention in chapter four of his book *Transforming Experience*. He turns to consider "the question of the adequacy of Dewey's political technology"—that is, whether the need for intelligent political practice is no more than an empty truism, given Dewey's silence about

the requirements to realize it.[14] By failing to specify any requisite political competencies or institutions, Dewey was criticized by his younger colleague at Columbia University, John Herman Randall, Jr. In the essay "Dewey's Interpretation of the History of Philosophy," Randall quoted several passages of *Liberalism and Social Action* in which Dewey called for the reform of inherited institutional arrangements and their outmoded practices through the rigorous application of social intelligence. Institutional change was needed, but by what method could it be achieved? Of course, for Dewey, the method is predominantly educational. "Public agitation, propaganda, legislative and administrative action are effective in producing the change of disposition," Dewey wrote, "but only in the degree in which they are educative—that is to say, in the degree in which they modify mental and moral attitudes."[15] Randall did not criticize Dewey for turning the question of how to facilitate institutional change into the question of how to educate institutional change-makers. Rather, he challenged Dewey to identify the competencies that such a political education should aim to develop in citizens: "Instead of many fine generalities about the 'method of cooperative intelligence,' Dewey might well direct attention to the crucial problem of extending our political skill. For political skill can itself be taken as a technological problem to which inquiry can hope to bring an answer. . . . Thus by rights Dewey's philosophy should culminate in the earnest consideration of the social techniques for reorganizing beliefs and behaviours—techniques very different from those dealing with natural materials. It should issue in a social engineering, in an applied science of political education—and not merely in the hope that someday we may develop one."[16]

Dewey's response to Randall was diplomatic—almost to a fault. After thanking Randall for his careful critique, Dewey concedes that his democratic vision begs for more detail: "The fact—which he points out—that I have myself done little or nothing in this direction does not detract from my recognition that in the concrete the invention of such a technology is the heart of the problem of intelligent action in political matters."[17] Dewey's concession could be damning evidence that his political ideals were too lofty and his democratic dreams too utopic. Dewey distinguished political democracy, which signifies the institutional phase of democratic governance, and democracy as a social idea (or way of life), which points to the conceptual or theoretical phase.[18] Several contemporary commentators have criticized Dewey, similar to Randall, for failing to operationalize, or make concrete, the meaning of political democracy.[19]

Roger Ames suggests one reason for Dewey's silence. Specifying the requisite political skills and institutions for realizing democratic ends, besides being undemocratic, is potentially dangerous. Superficially democratic means can easily transform into conservative instruments of state sanctioned violence. Ames writes, "On Dewey's understanding, the familiar institutionalized forms of democracy—a constitution, the office of president, the polling station, the ballot box, and so

on—far from being a guarantee of political order, can indeed become a source of just such coercion."[20] For instance, Dewey could have recommended a procedure for amending a state's constitution, one that is especially difficult to attain, on the rationale that it will sustain political order and continuity from one generation to the next. However, when the effect is to preserve a morally questionable constitutional provision (for instance, one that sustained practices of racial segregation), the constitutional provision converts to an undemocratic means or piece of political technology. Another problem with an individual (such as Dewey) determining what constitutes appropriate political technology in advance of democratic publics is that the resulting redefinition of genuine political culture prevents democratic growth. The ruling or elite culture becomes identical to political culture überhaupt, thereby foreclosing opportunities for social experimentation, popular criticism, and grassroots dissidence.[21] So, it appears that Dewey's move to demote political democracy relative to the aspirational ideal of democracy was warranted, given that the recommendation of absolute or fixed means is confining, tradition-bound, and potentially coercive.

While Ames offers one explanation for Dewey's silence on the matter of political technology, he does not tell us why Dewey would not postulate a set of intelligent political practices that, while tentatively democratic and fallible in light of future inquiries, could nevertheless inform political experiments aimed at achieving democratic ends. One approach, as we will be seen in the next section, is to describe Dewey as an institutionally oriented democratic theorist with an open-ended institutional agenda—that is, to appreciate Dewey's political technology, or lack thereof, from an institutionalist perspective.[22]

Another approach is to understand democratic means as culturally contingent and emergent phenomena, evoking similar notions in the work of Immanuel Kant and Franz Boas. I suggest that this approach works best if we appreciate Dewey's reasons for not specifying adequate political technology from an anthropological perspective.

From an Institutional Perspective

Institutions consist of funded beliefs and habits—what organizational theorists call *organizational culture*—the accretion of which have created objective organizations and agencies that persist in space and time.[23] According to Dewey, "[t]o say . . . [something] is institutionalized is to say that it involves a tough body of customs, ingrained habits of actions, organized and authorized standards, and methods of procedure."[24] So, ideas and ideals do not exhaust political experience; for their meaning to be suitably enriched, they should also manifest in stable political forms. However, ideals qualify the stability of institutional forms, permitting them to organically develop through critical scrutiny and reform.[25] While Dewey acknowledges that successful "institutions . . . are stable and enduring," their stability is

"only relatively fixed" because "they constitute the structure of the processes that go on . . . and are not forced upon processes from without."[26] In Hegel's philosophy of right,[27] the dialectical opposition between intellect and sense gradually transforms into self-consciousness and social institutions from a raw physical world; ultimately, they are reconciled in the Absolute, where "the real is rational, and the rational is real." Although Dewey's Hegel-influenced pragmatism dispenses with the Absolute, it retains a concern for how ideas and ideals directly influence the growth of those habit-funded processes called institutions.[28]

An emphasis on institutions does not preclude a concern for individuals, though. Indeed, personal development is, for Dewey, a precondition for institutional development, for "individuals who are democratic in thought and action are the sole final warrant for the existence and endurance of democratic institutions."[29] So as not to pre-emptively foreclose the many possible avenues before us, Dewey purposely avoided recommending a set of institutional arrangements or a final destination in the quest to realize a better form of democracy. In stark contrast, Francis Fukuyama declares that, by the latter half of the twentieth-century, "the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government" had been reached. Rather than advocate for "political democracy" or a discrete set of political institutions (in Fukuyama's case, liberal democratic ones), Dewey proposed a set of leading principles or postulations that together are termed the "social idea" of democracy.[30] As postulations, these ideas are intended to direct subsequent investigations into the design of a stable and viable governing apparatus; however, taken alone, they have no direct correspondence with any particular set of institutions.[31]

Dewey understands democracy as an open-ended struggle to achieve an emancipatory ideal which enriches individual and communal experience. Although "the measure of the worth of any social institution" is usually its "limited and more immediately practical" consequences, what the measure should be, Dewey insists, is "its effect in enlarging and improving experience."[32] Realizing the ideal (i.e., the social idea of democracy) therefore requires institutional change. However, Dewey does not presume to know—let alone recommend—the content of that institutional change in advance of its determination by the people and institutions of actual political democracies (e.g., elections, commissions of inquiry, judicial decisions, and regulatory agency rulings). Generating social and political reforms demands institutional transformation. However, the instrumentalities of change should not be preordained by a philosopher. According to David Waddington, Dewey "refuse[d] to specify the shape of social change in advance. If social change is to be truly democratic, it needs to be placed in the hands of the demos, in the hands of the workers and citizens who will actually make the change."[33] Specifying the right political-institutional technology to obtain social change would block opportunities for citizens to develop competencies through their own participation in the process.

Whether eliminating apartheid in South Africa or ameliorating racial injustice in the Southern United States, change begs for experimentation with alternate institutions. James Campbell contends that pragmatist policy-making should resemble an open-ended experimental program: "[A]ll policy measures should be envisioned as experiments to be tested in their future consequences. As a consequence of this testing, the program will undergo ongoing revision."[34] Likewise, Dewey writes, "[t]hinking ends in experiment and experiment is an actual alteration of a physically antecedent situation in those details or respects which called for thought in order to do away with some evil [or problem]."[35] Given the experimental thrust of institutional makeovers, long-term consequences are often uncertain, even to those who initiate them. As Dewey observes, "the great social changes which have produced new social institutions have been the cumulative effect of flank movements that were not obvious at the time of their origin."[36] Likewise, pragmatist theorizing about political institutions could, either intentionally or inadvertently, contribute to these "flank movements" that beget institutional change.

Indeed, there is some circumstantial historical evidence for this, such as the immense influence Dewey and other classic American pragmatists' ideas had on the Progressive movement of the early twentieth-century; and, more recently, some of the language and concepts of contemporary pragmatism that seeped into Barack Obama's campaign for political change.[37] If they continue on this trajectory, it would appear that pragmatists might have their ideas and ideals realized in the design of new institutions and the reconstruction of old ones. Of course, there is also the risk that these pragmatist ideas and ideals will be diluted or distorted in the process of becoming institutionalized.[38]

Whatever the outcome of specific institutional recommendations, the marriage of institutionalism and pragmatism appears to resolve the political technology conundrum. From an institutionalist perspective, Dewey's silence on the matter of political technology is excusable. He was an institutionalist without a specific institutional agenda. He simply refused to specify the right institutional make-up in advance, so as not to foreclose opportunities for genuine experimentation and democratic choice.

From an Anthropological Perspective

When pragmatists become institutionalists, a closer association between political theory and practice is forged. However, the institutionalist perspective falls short of addressing the political technology problem for at least two reasons. One, Dewey still cannot respond to the objection that some set of experimental and fallible democratic means must be proposed if we are to have any hope of achieving democratic ends. As he famously declared, "[p]hilosophy recovers itself when it ceases to be a device for dealing with the problems of philosophers and becomes a method, cultivated by philosophers, for dealing with the problems of men."[39] Dewey's silence on

the feasibility of particular institutional methods might be interpreted as a failure to address "the problems of men," an unwillingness to grapple with the practical obstacles institutional actors would face in implementing his vision of democracy. Two, democratic means are not exhausted by institutions, but extend downwards to even more tertiary tools and micro-level behaviors—specifically, to the political practices of agents who sometimes stand outside traditional institutional settings. For instance, political activists make demands on policymakers in ways that do not always involve formal petition, but extend to informal techniques, such as direct action and agitation. To call those techniques *institutions* would be a misnomer since the rationale for enacting them is that more traditional, institutionalized channels of redress have been exhausted. To deny political status to such activist techniques would be equally mistaken. If voice cannot be exercised in a traditional institutionalized setting, oftentimes the only alternative for the silenced or marginalized minority is to exit and resort to more radical means of political persuasion.

So, how do we understand Dewey's reluctance to specify exact political technology in a way that does not offend his concern with addressing the "problems of men" and accommodates the practices of political activists? A clue can be found in John Hermann Randall's comment that in "the broadest sense," Dewey's experimentalism "is the experimentalism of the anthropologist."[40] Late in life, Dewey expressed regret that he had not substituted the anthropological language of "culture" for "experience" in his landmark work *Experience and Nature* (1925):

> The name "culture" in its anthropological . . . sense designates the vast range of things experienced in an indefinite variety of ways. It possesses as a name just that body of substantial references which "experience" as a name has lost. It names artifacts which rank as "material" and operations upon and with material things. [. . .] "culture" designates, also in their reciprocal inter-connections, that immense diversity of human affairs, interests, concerns, values which compartmentalists pigeonhole under "religion," "aesthetics," "politics," "economics," etc., etc. Instead of separating, isolating, and insulating the many aspects of common life, "culture" holds them together in their human and humanistic unity—a service which "experience" has ceased to render."[41]

Dewey's preference for culture over experience signals not only a cultural turn in his writings, but also an anthropological turn. Culture is a more inclusive concept than experience, encompassing all those artifacts, ideas, and practices that make human life meaningful—including those conventionally bracketed under the headings "political" or "institutional." Taking an anthropological perspective is one way to sidestep the tendency among theorists to compartmentalize. To this end, I briefly examine the influence of Franz Boas 'and Immanuel Kant's anthropological writings on Dewey's views about culture, especially as they were expressed in *Human Nature and Conduct*, before returning to the main question of this inquiry:

How might we explain Dewey's silence about what constitutes adequate political technology without offending his concern with the "problems of men," and all the while accommodating the activities of political activists?

Franz Boas' and Dewey's tenures at Columbia University not only overlapped, but their correspondence reveals a degree of mutual intellectual influence beyond that of casual colleagues. In *The Mind of Primitive Man*, Boas dispelled the then-widespread presumption that racial differences were innate. Evidence suggested that these essentialized physical and cognitive differences reflected environmental and social differences instead.[42] Boas writes that "the variability in each racial unit is great. The almost insurmountable difficulty lies in the fact that physiological and psychological processes and particularly personality cannot be reduced to an absolute standard that is free of environmental elements. It is therefore gratuitous to claim that a race has a definite personality."[43] And elsewhere, he notes "that many so-called racial or hereditary traits are to be considered rather as a result of early exposure to certain forms of social conditions."[44] In a speech before the NAACP, Dewey would lean on Boas' findings in making his own argument against the view that racial differences are inherent.[45]

For Dewey and Boas, probably the most astounding area of intellectual confluence is their similar accounts of habits and the process of habituation. Boas writes, "The facts indicate that habits may modify structure . . . [which] suggests an instability of habits much greater than that of bodily form."[46] Human and non-human animals can overcome their hereditary limitations in the struggle to adapt to novel environmental conditions. The secret to adaptation is the development of new habits, which while more radical or unstable than an individual's morphology, can in time alter the habit-guided creature's bodily features. Where human behavior differs from non-human animal behavior is in the capacity to operate outside the range of "stereotyped" instincts, to engage in practice that "depends on local tradition and is learned."[47] In other words, habit formation in humans is tied to the perpetuation of culture, specifically the transference of traditions and localized knowledge through education. For Dewey, similar to Boas, what distinguishes humans from non-human animals is the capacity to develop intelligent habits and transmit cultural capital through the medium of education. According to Dewey, education is a "process of forming fundamental dispositions" or habits so that they "take effect in conduct."[48]

Besides the work of Boas, Dewey's views also found some inspiration in the anthropological writings of Immanuel Kant. Though Dewey was a regular critic of Kant (and his reading of Kant's work was distinctly Hegelian), his familiarity with Kant's opus is beyond question. Indeed, he wrote his lost doctoral dissertation on Kant's philosophical method and the problem of the external world.[49] In *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, Kant considers the obstacles to rational self-management. In the first section (titled "Anthropological Didactic"),

he addresses the psychological impediments, and in the second ("Anthropological Characteristic"), the physical and social hurdles to exercising reason in all areas of practical life.[50] Unlike Boas and Dewey, Kant propounded an essentialized theory of racial differences. He catalogued a list of these differences in the final part of the second section titled "The Character of the Species." To the book's credit, though, education factors feature strongly in the account of how humans rationally organize their individual and collective lives, controlling the will to act on their baser nature by becoming "educated to the good."[51] Unlike Dewey, Kant specifies exactly what political technology is required in order to attain this higher level of rational self-control. The recipe of political means for Kant is distinctly Republican: moral pedagogy, natural or non-dogmatic religion, and a civic constitution. With these instrumentalities, Kant believed that German culture could be brought into alignment with the dictates of reason and morality—or more plainly, with the requirements of Republican freedom. On at least the point that our notions of freedom, rationality and moral rightness are a function of culture, Dewey agreed with Kant.[52] For instance, in *Freedom and Culture* (1939), he writes that the "problem of freedom and of democratic institutions is tied up with the kind of culture that exists."[53]

However, Dewey disagreed with Kant that German culture would reach its zenith with the adoption of these three Republican political technologies. Earlier, in *German Philosophy and Politics*, Dewey accused Kant and German thinkers, generally, of advancing absolutist philosophies that deny the influence of culture, block the way toward social experimentation, and produce the conditions for statism and nationalism.[54] Likewise, as mentioned earlier, in "Democratic Ends Need Democratic Means for Their Realization" (1939), Dewey complained that the problem of "repression of cultural freedom" in Germany is not solely attributable to their fascist political system, but to their larger culture of absolutism, universalism, and strict obedience to a sense of moral duty at all costs.[55] While Dewey disputed whether Kant's recipe of political means (moral education, natural religion, and a civic constitution) had produced Republican freedom in Germany, he largely accepted Kant's argument in *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*. Large-scale political reforms demand similarly wide-ranging changes in a society's culture. Nevertheless, Dewey, unlike Kant, remained reluctant to specify what constitutes adequate political technology for realizing that change.

A further clue as to why Dewey was silent on the matter of political technology can be found in *Human Nature and Conduct* (1922), particularly in his treatment of habits. Dewey defines habit as "a way or manner of action, not a particular act or deed."[56] From a physiological perspective, habits resemble bodily functions, such as taking a breath or digesting food: "Breathing is an affair of the air as truly as of the lungs; digesting an affair of food as truly of tissues of the stomach."[57] From an ecological perspective, habits implicate more than an organism's body. Since a

habit is a mode of conduct, not the conduct itself, habits also signify ways of adapting to an environment, not just the adaptations themselves. Habit-guided organism-environment interaction is not just a matter of an agent acting on a world, but of an organism behaving within and through a living system, executing its daily functions as part of a larger web of biotic relations. According to Tom Burke, the "basic picture, generally speaking, is that of a given organism/environment system performing a wide range of operations as a normal matter of course."[58] Whether within a simple biological system or complex social one, environmental disruptions stimulate efforts by organisms to restore equilibrium, to synchronize their (functionally defined) internal and external environments (what process biologist call 'homeostasis') and to subsequently adapt to environing conditions through habit-guided adjustments.

From an anthropological perspective, habitual conduct is social through and through, a matter of generating the proper conditions for intelligent political action. Dewey writes, "We must work on the environment not merely on the hearts of men. To think otherwise is to suppose that flowers can be raised in a desert or motor cars run in a jungle. Both things can happen and without a miracle. But only by first changing the jungle and desert."[59] To generate genuine political change, reformers must raise popular consciousness about problems and proposed solutions. In Dewey's words, they need to "work . . . on the hearts of men." However, to ignite a virtuous cycle, they must do more than simply reform the technology of change (changing the furniture, so-to-speak); they also need to transform the cultural and environmental conditions under which intelligent habits take form ("changing the jungle and the desert"). Predetermining the content of that political change, or specifying the exact political technology in advance, cuts the chord between habits and action, modes of conduct and the conduct itself, generating the action or conduct but not the reformist impulse that delivers us to intelligent reformist habits again and again. Thus, education is one of the few forms of political technology Dewey goes to any significant length to elaborate, for it is itself an open-ended process of forming good inclinations to action, enriching cooperative experience, and transmitting ideas from one generation to the next. Rather than perfectly anticipate outcomes (whether in terms of political institutions or practices), education provides the environmental and cultural conditions for cultivating those habits that lead individuals to engage in collective action—now and later. One way to suss out this conclusion is by distinguishing between political technologies and habits. [60] However, I believe that this path is unproductive because, as mentioned, political institutions are funded habits, so that the distinction ultimately turns out to be one without a difference. Educating for political action is a perfectly Deweyan interpretation of what constitutes adequate political technology within a thriving democratic society.

Conclusion

To conclude, I would like to return to the late Michael Eldridge's perspective on the matter of Dewey's silence about political technology by first discussing his commentary on the work of Randy Shaw and, lastly, by stating why we should make a closer study of this important scholar's work.

Eldridge elaborated on why Dewey's notion of political technology encompasses political activism. In *Transforming Experience*, he turns to Randy Shaw's work *The Activist's Handbook* as a resource for expanding Dewey's conception of political technology and responding to John Herman Randall's critique. Shaw, a law student and low-income housing activist, describes his general approach to organizing in a Deweyan spirit.[61] In Eldridge's words, Shaw's approach dictates that "activists should not just react to crises, but use them to organize strategically."[62] As a reflective practitioner, Shaw illustrates in a series of case studies how this approach guides individuals in their organized efforts to promote social justice—whether through strategically planning, assessing politicians' actions (and promised for actions), collaborating with adjacent organizations, initiating legal action, or agitating authorities.[63] With the help of Shaw and Dewey, Eldridge explains how political technology operates on the street level: "Many advocates for social justice start with a rationally generated ideal and demand that an existing situation be replaced by one that conforms to their ideal.[64] Dewey, who was not without his ideals, would seem to side with political operatives, the political "pragmatists," in requiring that any suggested change take the existing situation into account and work from there. One moves the current practice toward an ideal, modifying both situation and ideal as needed, through a process of deliberative change." In other words, political technologies and democratic ideals must be adapted to the conditions of the situation and the objectives of the present inquiry, a truism that political operatives live by and Dewey respected as a constraint on his own political philosophy.

Eldridge's elaboration of Dewey's answer to Randall in terms of Shaw's recommendations for social justice activists is helpful insofar as it operationalizes what Dewey might have meant by adequate political technology. Moreover, it does so from an anthropological perspective. Eldridge treats Deweyan political technology as a form of cultural practice and habitual activity, both in "the way action is organized" and "the publicly available symbolic forms through which people experience and express meaning."[65] I strongly believe that Eldridge's scholarly work, his legacy, is worthy of close attention and inquiry by pragmatists and Dewey scholars today. His own writings on Dewey's historical engagements, pragmatic political activism, Obama's pragmatism and the many meanings of pragmatism, to name only a few topics, demonstrate rigor, honesty, and acumen that are rare.[66] Eldridge was also a scholar-teacher who continually challenged others, pressing them to ask uncomfortable questions about Dewey's life and work—not just to idolize the historical figure, but to criticize, improve, and extend his ideas in meaningful ways.[67]

Acknowledgment

I would like to acknowledge the late Michael Eldridge, a scholar and a gentleman who influenced many young Dewey scholars during his lifetime.

Notes

1. Dewey, EW, 5:93. Citations of Dewey's writings are to *The Collected Works of John Dewey: 1882–1953, electronic edition*, Past Masters, ed. Jo Ann Boydston and Larry A. Hickman (Charlottesville: Intelex Corporation, 1996). To cite specific sections, I follow the conventional method, LW (Later Works) or MW (Middle Works) or EW (Early Works), volume: page number. For example, EW 5:93 refers to the Early Works, volume 5, page 93. I also cite the original date of publication.

2. John Herman Randall, Jr. "Dewey's Interpretations of the History of Philosophy," in *The Philosophy of John Dewey*, ed. A. Schilpp (New York: Tudor Publishing Company, 1951), 82.

3. Michael Eldridge, *Transforming Experience: John Dewey's Cultural Instrumentalism* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1998), 83.

4. Dewey, LW, 13:367.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

7. Dewey, LW, 13:226.

8. Dewey, LW, 2:325.

9. Dewey, LW, 2:326.

10. I make a more detailed argument that Dewey is not a deliberative democrat, at least not in the modern sense, in "Dewey and Goodin on the Value of Monological Deliberation" and "Dewey's Theory of Moral (and Political) Deliberation Unfiltered."

11. Dewey, LW, 2:371.

12. Dewey, LW, 2:325.

13. Dewey, LW, 13:187.

14. Eldridge, *Transforming Experience,* 113.

15. Dewey, MW, 9:338.

16. Randall, "Dewey's Interpretations of the History of Philosophy," 77–102. Cited by Michael Eldridge. See note 2.

17. Dewy, LW, 14:75. Cited by Michael Eldridge. See note 2.

18. Dewey claims that in the institutional phase "[w]e 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."

"Creative Democracy—The Task Before Us" (Dewy, LW, 14:225). In the ideational phase, "[t]he idea of democracy is a wider and fuller idea than can be exemplified in the state even at its best. To be realized it must affect all modes of human association, the family, the school, industry, religion" (Dewey, LW 2:325).

19. See, for instance, Robert B. Westbrook, *Democratic Hope: Pragmatism and the Politics of Truth* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005) 185; and Sheldon S. Wolin, *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004) 512.

20. Roger T. Ames, "Tang Junyi and the Very 'Idea' of Confucian Democracy," in Democracy as Culture: Deweyan Pragmatism in a Globalizing World, ed. S. Tan and J. Whalen-Bridge (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008), 179.

21. Frank Lentricchia describes the need for cultural criticism: "Ruling culture does not define the whole of culture, though it tries to, and it is the task of the oppositional critic to re-read culture so as to amplify and strategically position the marginalized voices of the ruled, exploited, oppressed and excluded." Lentricchia, Frank, *Criticism and Social Change*, reprint edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 15.

22. This treatment of Dewey as an institutionalist closely follows my account in "Can Pragmatists be Institutionalists?"

23. By habit Dewey does not just mean a rutted channel or encrusted pattern of past behavior. Habits are live with values, virtues and possibilities for intelligent action. Dewey explains why he chose to employ the word 'habit' as the repository of both values and virtues: "But we need a word ['habit'] to express that kind of human activity which is influenced by prior activity and in that sense acquired; which contains within itself a certain ordering or systematization of minor elements of action; which is projective, dynamic in quality, ready for overt manifestation; and which is operative in some subdued subordinate form even when not obviously dominating activity" (Dewey, MW, 14:31).

24. Dewey, LW 3:153.

25. In Dewey's words, "[i]deals . . . that are not embodied in institutions are of little avail." John Dewey, "Liberating the Social Scientist," *Commentary* 4, (October 1947): 10.

26. Dewey, LW, 14:119.

27. Hegel, G W. F. (1807) 1979. The Phenomenology of Spirit. trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press.

28. Dewey credits the "Hegelian deposit" in his philosophy in his autobiographical essay "From Absolutism to Experimentalism" (Dewey, LW, 5:147–59).

29. Dewey, LW, 14:92.

30. Similar to Fukuyama, though, Dewey defines political democracy in liberal-democratic terms, that is, as those "traditional political institutions" which include "general suffrage, elected representatives, [and] majority rule" (Dewey, LW,

2:325). Frances Fukuyama, "The End of History?" *The National Interest* 16, (Summer 1989): 210, https://www.jstor.org/stable/24027184.

31. Dewey's reluctance to specify model institutions that realize his democratic ideal is mirrored in the aversion that contemporary critical theorists have to institutional design. According to Schutz, "Dewey resisted calls for him to develop a specific model of democratic government, arguing that it must look differently in different contexts." Aaron Schutz, "John Dewey and 'a Paradox of Size': Democratic Faith and the Limits of Experience," *American Journal of Education* 109, no. 3 (May 2001): 288, https://doi.org/10.1086/444273. Dryzek explains: "Overly precise specification of model institutions involves skating on thin ice. Far better, perhaps, to leave any such specification to the individual involved. The appropriate configuration will depend on the constraints and opportunities of the existing social situation, the cultural tradition(s) to which the participants subscribe, and the capabilities and desires of these actors." John Dryzek, "Discursive Designs: Critical Theory and Political Institutions," *American Journal of Political Science* 31, no. 3 (August 1987): 665, https://www.jstor.org/stable/2111287.

32. Further on, Dewey writes, "[T]he ultimate value of every institution is its distinctively human effect—its effect upon conscious experience . . ." (Dewey, MW, 9:9–10).

33. David Waddington (2008, 62)

34. James Campbell, *Understanding John Dewey: Nature and Cooperative Intelligence, International Studies in Philosophy (Chicago: Open Court Publishing Company, 1995), 201–8*.

35. Dewey, MW, 10:339 (emphasis in the original).

36. Dewey, LW, 14:96.

37. Mitchell Aboulafia, "Obama's Pragmatism and the Stimulus Package," *Up@Night* (blog), February 2, 2009, https://upnight.com/2009/02/09/obamas-pragmatism-and-the-stimulus-package/. Michael Eldridge, "Adjectival and Generic Pragmatism: Problems and Possibilities" Human Affairs 19, no. 1 (2009): 10–8, https://doi.org/10.2478/v10023-009-0015-y. Peter Levine, *The New Progressive Era: Toward a Fair and Deliberative Democracy* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000); and Sunstein 2008).

38. Piki Ish-Shalom, "Theorizing Politics, Politicizing Theory, and the Responsibility that Runs Between." *Perspectives on Politics* 7, no. 2 (2009): 303–16. https://www.jstor.org/stable/40406932.

39. Dewey, MW, 10:42.

40. Randall, "Dewey's Interpretations," 82.

41. Dewey, LW, 1:362–63.

42. Franz Boas, (1911) 1938, *The Mind of Primitive Man*, 2nd ed. (New York: The MacMillan Company).

43. Ibid., 196.

44. Franz Boas, "The Methods of Ethnology," *American Anthropologist* 22, no. 4 (1920): 320, https://doi.org/10.1525/aa.1920.22.4.02a00020.

45. Dewey, LW, 6:224–30.

46. Boas, *The Mind of Primitive Man*, 162–3.

47. Ibid., 163.

48. Dewey, MW, 9:338.

49. The central ideas of Dewey's lost 1884 dissertation are thought to be preserved in his essay "Kant and Philosophic Method" (Dewey, EW, 1:30–40), which was published in the same year.

50. Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy, ed. Robert B. Louden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). Based on lectures given in 1772/3 and 1795/96.

51. Kant, *Anthropology, 7, 325*.

52. However, I would not take the next step and call Kant a "pragmatist." For a recent commentator who does, though for more methodological than substantive reasons, see Robert B. Brandom, *Perspectives on Pragmatism: Classical, Recent, and Contemporary* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 3–4.

53. Dewey, LW, 13:72.

54. John Dewy, *German Philosophy and Politics (Freeport: Henry Holt and Company, 1915)* https://www.questia.com/read/5749767/german-philosophy-and-politics. For commentary and analysis, see Campbell (2004) and James Scott Johnston, "Dewey's Critique of Kant." *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 42, no. 4 (Fall 2006): 537–45, https://www.jstor.org/stable/40321348.

55. Dewey, LW, 13:367.

56. Dewey, LW, 12:21.

57. Dewey, LW, 14:15.

58. Tom Burke, *Dewey's New logic: A Reply to Russell* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994). 23.

59. Dewey, LW, 14:19–20.

60. I thank the referee for this important point.

61. Though more empirically oriented than Shaw's handbook, John Bowers and Donovan Ochs' study of political activism in the 1960s also has a Deweyan spirit to it. They examined the rhetorical strategies employed by social movement participants in advocating for social change, from petitioning authorities to promulgating their ideas in public forums, solidifying their base of support with slogans and symbols of solidarity, to non-violent resistance, and finally to escalating and confronting authorities in ways that prompt members of the establishment to overreact and humiliate themselves. See John W. Bowers and Donavan J. Ochs. *The Rhetoric of Agitation and Control* (Boston: Addison Wesley Publishers, 1971), 16–28.

62. Eldridge, *Transforming Experience*, 118.

63. Ibid., 118–9.

64. Ibid., 120.

65. Ann Swidler, "Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies," *American Sociological Review* 51, no. 2 (1986): 273–76, https://doi.org//10.2307/2095521

66. Eldridge, *Transforming Experience;* Eldridge, "Adjectival and Generic Pragmatism"; and Michael Eldridge "Linking Obama's Pragmatism to Philosophical Pragmatism: Obama as a Pragmatic Democrat" *Contemporary Pragmatism* 8, no. 2 (2011): 113–21, https://doi.org/10.1163/18758185-90000205.

67. This is a task that I humbly tried to accomplish in my first book, dedicated to Eldridge, titled *John Dewey's Great Debates—Reconstructed.*

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