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Democracy and Education *and Europe: A Century Long Exchange*

1. *A Travelling Classic*

On the centennial anniversary of the publication of Dewey's *Democracy and Education* (New York, Macmillan, 1916) this symposium (including contributions from European and non European scholars) explores both the epoch-making significance and the topicality of the ideas in Dewey's masterpiece for the development of European educational reflection.

Democracy and Education has frequently been represented as a turning point in educational discourse, inaugurating a radically new regime for educational theory which deeply influenced the 20th century's educational culture. Indeed Dewey's masterpiece may be used as a sort of litmus test to assess in which horizon different (European) educational theories (and experiences) can be situated. As Oelkers highlights, *Democracy and Education* started out from a "developed discourse" regarding the nature and role of public education that Dewey entered pointing out that in order to explore that relationship properly it was necessary to understand "which theory of education is at all suitable for this relationship" (Oelkers 2005: 8).

Bellman (2006) explains the widespread dissemination of Dewey's ideas, referring to a framework defined by Meyer and Ramirez (2002) within which the educational ideas that travel most extensively are those which have both a *universalistic* and a *rationalising* quality. According to this framework, the universalistic quality of the ideas expressed in *Democracy and Education* undoubtedly justifies the "travels" (Striano 2016) of Dewey's masterpiece to very different cultural, political and social world areas (such as China, Japan, Turkey, the Soviet Russia and Europe) through an impressive number of translations, reviews and commentaries as well as lectures on its themes in these settings by Dewey himself.

At different levels and in different contexts, indeed, *Democracy and Education* has contributed to opening up and sustaining an ongoing debate on the cultural and social role of education and on the value of education for social development which remains a universally shared concern. The universal relevance of this concern was clearly visible in contexts of cultural, political and social reconstruction which emerged, for example, after the Soviet Revolution in Russia and after both World Wars in Europe. Once again it is central in contemporary institutional and political agendas, documents and recommendations (see for example the objectives of the *UNESCO Dakar Framework for Action*); it constitutes a general frame of reference within which educational discourses practices have to be inscribed in order to gain effective meaning and scope.

But it is not only the universalistic quality of the ideas explored and proposed in *Democracy and Education* that makes that work an enduring reference point for educational reflection. Dewey's masterpiece has, in addition, a significant rationalizing

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power that has not been sufficiently explained and used to sustain the necessary deconstruction and reconstruction of educational ideas, models, theories, scopes and values within contemporary educational discourse. Indeed, as Dewey explains in the “Preface” to the work, the aim of his work was to “to detect and state the ideas implied in a democratic society” and to “apply these ideas to the problems of the enterprise of education” (MW 9: 3).¹ Dewey therefore suggested a model of inquiry that highlighted the necessity of laying bare the ideas grounding democratic societies in order to test their consistency with current educational processes and practices. Such an inquiry would thus expose the need for a deconstruction and reconstruction of ideas and theories formulated in other, nondemocratic eras and settings which might prove inconsistent with the educational purposes of a truly democratic society.

This is the rationalizing function of a philosophically grounded “general theory of education” that could assist educators and political actors in reaching a deeper understanding of the educational task before those who in different times have been willing to orient the educational enterprise towards the development of a truly democratic society. In this perspective *Democracy and Education* has offered and still offers a very effective methodological tool and reference in supporting the identification and the reflective examination of some crucial issues that have occupied and still occupy a preeminent space within contemporary educational debate:

- the cultural and social implication of education, intended as a continuous process of reconstruction and reorganization of individual and collective experience;
- the role of philosophy as a general theory of education to reflectively support and orient educational policies and practices;
- the role of education (as a theoretically grounded and socially acknowledged practice) in supporting social growth and social development according to a philosophically grounded democratic pattern, contextually and historically situated.

The rationalizing power of *Democracy and Education* has been often reduced by the mediation of the forms of discourse through which it has been introduced in the arena of the educational debate (for example it has been used as a reference to sustain educational change and innovation in very different contexts and historical moments mainly through an institutional and political discourse underpinned by peculiar narratives and rhetorics).

Over time in Europe, but also in the Mediterranean space, or in the Eastern countries, *Democracy and Education* and its translations have had deep connections and implications in the complex dynamics of institutional and social change but have rarely been referred to as theoretical and methodological reference to explore the conceptions and ideas that shape contemporary educational processes and practices in order to connect them to new possible forms of social order.

1. References to John Dewey’s published works are to the critical edition, *The Collected Works of John Dewey, 1882-1953*, edited by Boydston J. A., Carbondale and Edwardsville, Southern Illinois University Press, 1967-1991, and published in three series as *The Early Works 1882-1899* [EW], *The Middle Works 1899-1924* [MW], and *The Later Works 1925-1953* [LW].

A critical reconstruction of the reception of *Democracy and Education* (in Europe and in other cultural and political areas), and an analysis of its living legacy have to be focused on the relationship highlighted by Dewey between the “ideas” circulating in contemporary cultural and socio-political scenarios and educational institutions, policies and practices.

This requires us to understand Dewey’s masterpiece first of all as rationalizing reference and textual matrix useful in exploring the theoretical, political and practical issues implied whenever and wherever educational reforms are needed, planned, and implemented with reference to the establishment of a new social and political order; secondly to approach it through a multilevel reading, focusing simultaneously on the cultural, ethical, political and practical forms of discourse imbedded in the text in order to sustain the reconstruction of the meaning and sense of educational policies and practices which is lacking in contemporary educational discourse.

2. A Trans-Atlantic Give-And-Take: Democracy and Education Between the European Educational Tradition and the Modern Discourse of Learning

We have delineated thus far a picture of the reasons for considering *Democracy and Education* a reference point for debates on and projects of reconstruction in education (at both the theoretical and practical level) in different contexts, including Europe and the Mediterranean area, while hinting at the need to approach it through a complex reading that does not disconnect the various dimensions which are closely interwoven in its philosophical-educational device (but, as aforementioned, very rarely has this multilevel appropriation occurred).

Speaking of the question of the influence of Dewey, Gert Biesta and Siebren Miedema have pointed out – arguably in a genuinely Deweyan perspective – that

[t]he activity of reception entails an interaction between existing traditions, ideas, and practices and input from the “outside” – which implies that change will be the rule and continuity the exception. Interaction always brings with it questions about context, since it is the specific context in which ideas and practices are received which is of a decisive influence on the way in which these ideas and practices are taken up, digested, translated, transformed, and eventually made into something new. (Biesta & Miedema 2000: 33)

This explains also why very often, in different contexts, we have to do with “Deweyesque practice” (to idiosyncratically adopt a phrase of Darling & Nisbet 2000: 40) rather than with a real re-fashioning of educational practices according to Deweyan ideas.

The engagement of this symposium with the question of the significance of *Democracy and Education* as a turning point of the European educational discourse and an ‘inescapable’ interlocutor in the ongoing European educational conversations, involving multiple voices and traditions, should be situated within the horizon of that thriving strand of scholarship represented by the study of the reception of Dewey’s ideas (see Oelkers & Rhyn 2000; Popkewitz 2005; Hickman & Spadafora 2009;

Bruno-Jofré *et al.* 2010; and Bruno-Jofré & Schriewer 2012). Jürgen Schriewer has aptly argued that this scholarly interest should be interpreted within a broader perspective and not related exclusively to the importance of Dewey's work as an educational theorist, great as it has been:²

The international circulation of knowledge has become a prominent topic of research over the last few decades [...]. One of the most productive strands of research in this respect is neo-institutionalist sociology. Insistently it has emphasized the particular role that the global diffusion of knowledge – knowledge understood in a broad sense, including philosophical ideas on education, progress, and democracy as elaborated by scholars like John Dewey – has played as a basic mechanism contributing to the construction of what authors such as John W. Meyer have called the modern “world culture” or “world society.” (Schriewer 2012: 1)

Against the backdrop of an increasing body of literature devoted to the world-wide impact of Dewey's educational theory and philosophy, what is the specific contribution of this symposium, apart from its predominant (and celebratory) focus on only one among Dewey's works? We would like to mention two aspects, which, without excluding any other possible readings of this special issue, could provide a compass to orient oneself in it. Both aspects are closely related to the zooming in on the European context.

First, the relationship between Dewey and Europe should be read in both directions, so to speak: not only have different European cultural traditions ‘taken up’ *Democracy and Education* through the aforementioned process of interaction (as the papers of Samuel Renier and Bianca Thoillez in this symposium show respectively in reference to France and Spain) but Dewey's masterpiece is itself a way of engaging with the European culture. As the opening paper of this special issue makes it clear, Dewey deployed a very sophisticated strategy to critique some trends in American education: he did not discuss them explicitly but rather by way of analogy, by illustrating the limitations and weaknesses of some theoretical devices of the European educational tradition, which act, accordingly, as the ‘polemical substitutes’ for the actual and coeval addressees of Dewey's critique. This insightful suggestion of Avi Mintz (who examines in detail this argumentative strategy in reference to Chapter 7 of *Democracy and Education*) could be extended to other parts of the book (and, more generally, of Dewey's works). We will confine ourselves here to some hints about the chapters preceding Chapter 7. In the first four chapters, Dewey presents some of his main ideas on education (culminating in the notion of growth in Chapter 4) showing throughout the influence of Darwin and evolutionary theory. Chapters 5 and 6 are dedicated to exploring some ideas of the educational tradition, by showing their weaknesses (but also their strengths). In these chapters, the manifest ‘interlocutors’ of Dewey are Froebel and Hegel, Locke and Herbart, that is, additional European thinkers (see Section 2 of the paper of Bianca Thoillez in this symposium about the relation

2. “John Dewey's educational thought began to receive world-wide attention immediately after publication of *School and Society* in 1899. Scholars are only now beginning to chronicle and interpret this phenomenon” (Bruno-Jofré *et al.* 2010: 3).

between Dewey and Froebel and how this impacted on the reception of Dewey within the Spanish culture). Through the screen of a bright historical reconstruction of some moments of the educational thought we can, however, spot also the profiles of some theories which were still current – and often hegemonic – in the American educational landscape at the time of the publication of *Democracy and Education*. To put it in a nutshell: In the early chapters of *Democracy and Education* Dewey first presents his conception of education (itself influenced by new developments in European thought) and then offers a thorough-going philosophical critique of the influential and revered philosophical-educational approaches of the European heritage against which that conception represents the epoch-making alternative.

This is the first facet of what we could call the Dewey-Europe give-and-take. The second facet could be introduced by taking the cue from some considerations developed by a contemporary French philosopher with a strong interest in education, Denis Kambouchner (2013). In his recent *L'École, une question philosophique*, after explicating the challenge of Durkheim's educational thinking to the French humanities-oriented tradition in schooling, Kambouchner shows how the paradigm shift in education embodied by Dewey's *Democracy and Education* posed an even greater threat to Durkheim's project than "objections of the humanistic kind" (*Ibid.*: 296). This is a noteworthy remark: although both Durkheim and Dewey championed a 'new intellectual culture' based upon modern science, they represented two completely different options. Despite his criticisms to the traditional 'literary' curriculum and the innovations he suggested introducing by drawing upon the "culture of languages," the "scientific culture" and the "historical culture" (*Ibid.*: 292 ff.), Durkheim – in Kambouchner's view – still belonged to the traditional camp in educational theory, focussed on a pedagogy of the "presentation" of the "contents" and on the "imprints that the minds will keep of the contents which are presented to them" (*Ibid.*: 296). In contrast, Dewey's educational theory notoriously pivots on the interests of children and it invites educators not to ignore – as was common in traditional pedagogy – "the existence in a living being of active and specific functions which are developed in the redirection and combination which occur as they are occupied with their environment" (MW 9: 77). Dewey does not dismiss the significance of the "past products" of culture, but insists that the latter are significant insofar as "the heritage from the past" is placed "in its right connection with the demands and opportunities of the present" (MW 9: 81). As strong as Durkheim's emphasis on the innovation of the curriculum in the direction of a harmonization with the modern, science-oriented society, may have been, he remained, in Kambouchner's interpretation, within a classic educational framework. Dewey, with *Democracy and Education*, by contrast, inaugurated a radically new regime for educational theory also in the European context. This regime culminates in the idea that education is about the promotion in "the human being [of] a habit of learning [so that] [h]e learns to learn" (MW 9: 50).

Jürgen Oelkers also calls attention to the significance of this shift of focus:

Ultimately, the child learns to learn [...], to use Dewey's famous phrase which turns up here for the first time. "Learning to learn" calls for controlled and intelligent processes

in adapting to changing situations and not for a movement that has a fixed goal and remains unaffected by learning. (Oelkers 2000: 7; emphasis added)

It should be noted that in some respects the phrase “learning to learn” cannot be considered as a Dewey coinage and is well attested in Europe before the introduction of Dewey’s ideas. For instance, to pick up just one example from the French educational debate, as early as in 1893 Léon Bourgeois stated in a public speech:

The goal of primary education should not be that of providing the child with a great amount of knowledge but rather it should consist in making the child able to acquire a lot of knowledge. This is, and not only in primary education, [...] what I consider to be an axiom in pedagogical matters: the goal of all teaching in general (I may appear to tell a paradox but I believe that it is the truth) is not learning but learning to learn. (Bourgeois 1893: 114)³

It could be plausibly argued that, although Dewey may not have been the first to use the phrase, he gave it a new spin, originating from the novelty of his philosophy and, in particular, of his ideas about experience and knowledge. And this seems to be the reason why Kambouchner, a sophisticated champion of the tradition of humanistic education, construes the “modern authority of Dewey” (Kambouchner 2013: 344) in the following terms:

Dewey’s statements about the goals of education as having to consist in the continuation of education have kept an authoritativeness that the cumbersome vulgate of the “learning to learn” should not lead us to minimize. (*Ibid.*: 33)

It is to note, first, that by speaking of “the cumbersome vulgate of the ‘learning to learn’” Kambouchner implicitly refers to what has become over a decade a catchword of the EU official discourse in education, since an influential act of the European Parliament (*Recommendation 2006/962/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning* [Official Journal L 394 of 30.12.2006]). In this Recommendation eight key-competences are listed and one of these is the learning to learn defined as “the ability to pursue and organise one’s own learning, either individually or in groups, in accordance with one’s own needs, and awareness of methods and opportunities.” Secondly, although Kambouchner is clear in not conflating Dewey’s tenets and the EU discourse of the “learning to learn,” he is not willing to consider Dewey as an ally but prefers to recur to the tradition of the humanistic education. In other words, while recognizing that a Deweyan “learning to learn” is not coextensive with the drift of learnification (as Biesta (2006, 2010) has called it), Kambouchner seems to nurture misgivings about the Deweyan project as well.

Not all critics of the Deweyan approach have been, however, so balanced as Kambouchner and the tendency to enlist Dewey’s legacy as an underpinning of

3. We have selected a thinker like Bourgeois because he falls within the scope of that “transatlantic community of discourse in philosophy and political theory” (Kloppenber 1986: 3) to which James Kloppenberg has dedicated his classic study. On Bourgeois, see (*Ibid.*: 301ff).

the contemporary European discourse on learning is always incumbent in many educational camps. For this reason, on the centennial of the publication of *Democracy and Education* it has seemed important to ask: does the EU project of creating a transnational space of learning (also by furthering a convergence of the different EU educational systems) really represent the outcome of an ‘educational philosophy’ (in a broad sense) akin to Dewey’s? Or could the latter – perhaps especially as inspired by *Democracy and Education* – act rather as a tool for the criticism of the dominant trends in EU policies? The papers of Andreas Nordin and Ninni Wahlström, and of Vasco D’Agnese, explicitly engage with these questions, showing that the panoply of notions and categories marshalled in *Democracy and Education* might offer us a repertoire of tools to counter certain drifts in the educational discourse rather than means for undergirding them.

The essays of Michael Luntley and Larry Hickman round out this symposium: the former tackles the limitations of the contemporary educational policy through a re-examination of Dewey’s account of inquiry and of his conception of ‘problem.’ In particular, Luntley shows how it is necessary to appeal to the aesthetics of experience in order to make sense of those pre-cognitive disruptions in the organism-environment transaction from which problems start. Larry Hickman engages with a most topical issue, namely the use of technology in education (see Waks 2013; and Oliverio 2015). It is also an ‘educational frontier’ of the EU discourse, as is manifest, for instance, in the communication from the commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European economic and social committee and the committee of the regions (COM(2013) 654), bearing the significant title *Opening up Education: Innovative Teaching and Learning for All through New Technologies and Open Educational Resources*. The very beginning of the text is revealing of the typical horizon within which most EU educational discourses are situated:

This Communication sets out a European agenda for stimulating high-quality, innovative ways of learning and teaching through new technologies and digital content. ‘Opening up education’ proposes actions towards more open learning environments to deliver education of higher quality and efficacy and thus contributing to the Europe 2020 goals of boosting EU competitiveness and growth through better skilled workforce and more employment. (COM(2013) 654: 2)

The typical neo-liberal ring of the EU documents, to which Nordin, Wahlström and D’Agnese draw our attention, resonates also in this passage. Hickman, in his contribution to this symposium, shows how *Democracy and Education* offers an alternative framework for deploying technology – as a way of empowering students and cultivating the project of a democratic education.

3. Democracy and Education *and the Roman Catholic and Marxist Traditions*

In our call for papers for this symposium we had solicited also contributions dealing with the responses to *Democracy and Education* coming from various institutions and

ideologies, such as the Catholic Church and Soviet-oriented Communism. Although Samuel Renier in his paper presents some reactions of Marxist critics in France to *Democracy and Education* (and their critiques are fairly representative of the typical bone of contention of Marxists in relation to Dewey's thought), the reader will find no papers in this symposium specifically focused on these topics. We would like, therefore, to illustrate, in broad strokes, the reasons why we had spotlighted these themes.

A few years before the publication of *Democracy and Education*, Dewey had pointed out the similarity between pragmatism and

the theory of "economic interpretation of history," taken in its broad sense. According to this theory, the main features of the structure of any particular society are best understood by looking first into how that society went at the problem of maintaining itself in existence – how it undertook the primary business of "making its living." (MW 4: 178)

We mention this passage because it testifies to the possibility of an elective affinity between Dewey's and Marxist educational theories, at least in some respects. And, in fact, this affinity seems to have marked Dewey's reception in the USSR mainly at the beginning. Irina Mchitarjan (2012) has reconstructed the history of Dewey's influence in the Soviet Russia, from the "enormous upswing" (*Ibid.*: 180) in the first years of the Revolution, with the translation of various works and, in particular, of *Democracy and Education* in 1921, to the rejection from the late 1920s "with the 'intensification of the class struggle' and the increasing control over the school by the Bolshevik Party" (*Ibid.*: 186). Mchitarjan highlights how the initial favourable reception was principally the outcome of three factors: that "Dewey's pragmatic education corresponded best to the ideas of Marxism," the Deweyan "well-reasoned pedagogy as such," and finally the commitment of liberal Soviet educators to promoting the "adoption of international progressive education" (*Ibid.*: 188). The subsequent attack on Dewey was due less to purely educational and pedagogical reasons than to the "lack of political intention" of his pedagogy, which "could not support the ideas of class struggle, of the dictatorship of the proletariat, and of communism" (*Ibid.*: 188-9).

At a philosophical level, Dewey and Soviet theorists strongly disagreed about the question of relation means-ends (think also of Dewey's reflections in the 1930s: e.g. (LW 13: 349 ff.). See also Waks 1999). This difference reverberated also in contrasting views about educational reform:

Whereas for Dewey freedom was both the end and the means of social change, the Bolsheviks wanted to enforce the idea of social freedom by authoritarian means – even in school. (Mchitarjan 2012: 189)⁴

4. It is appropriate to refer, in this context, also to the interesting reflections of the Italian philosopher and historian of education Nicola Siciliani de' Cumis (2003) on the relationship between the most important and influential Soviet educationalist, Anton Makarenko, and John Dewey. Although no real encounter is chronicled, Siciliani de' Cumis insists on "the hypothetical, objective fruitfulness of a virtual and at distance dialogue" (*Ibid.*: 380) between these two major figures of 20th century educational theory.

The relationship with the Catholic culture is not less significant, for at least two reasons. First, as Bruno-Jofré *et al.* (2010: 8) have noted, “the intersection of religion in the uptake of Dewey and its bearing on the understanding of democratic education” is a most important factor to explore when engaging with the question of Dewey’s influence. While their discussion focuses on the configurations that Dewey’s ideas took in specific historical circumstances and contexts, we would like to highlight, in an admittedly sketchy way, a more general issue in the Dewey-Europe give-and-take, namely the reception of *Democracy and Education* within the Catholic philosophical world.

Second, it can be argued that the confrontation with the Catholic culture is a constant motif in Dewey’s production. Indeed, the Catholic culture is, in his view, one of the most influential embodiments of that unmodern philosophy that still operates at the ethical and political level and prevents “the genuinely modern” (MW 12: 273) from coming into existence. In *Unmodern Philosophy and Modern Philosophy* (Dewey 2012: 56), while discussing the medieval synthesis, Dewey highlights:

The thing which is enduringly effective, however, is the existence of a social institution as the source, bearen nurse, and administrator of the imaginative and emotional appeals. [...] More particularly, it is through the Roman Catholic Church that the ideas of Plato and Aristotle effectively entered the culture of the western world until they live on in man’s interpretation and understanding of what they do and what they believe at the present time.

At a more educational level, the persistence of an unmodern attitude manifests itself in projects like “The Great Books” by Robert Maynard Hutchins and Mortimer Adler, expressly based on a view of philosophy as *philosophia perennis*, inspired by the metaphysics of Aristotle and St. Thomas. Dewey strongly opposed this educational conception (LW 11: 397 ff.) and in *Experience and Education* he explicitly warned about the perils of a “return to the logic of ultimate first principles expressed in the logic of Aristotle and St. Thomas” aimed at providing “the young [with] sure anchorage in their intellectual and moral life” so that they are not “at the mercy of every passing breeze that blows” (LW 13: 57-8).

The Catholic world reciprocated this mistrust: even when the relevance and significance of Dewey’s thought was recognized (as has often been the case in many Catholic thinkers), the dangers of his approach were emphasized, in particular in reference to the lack of a metaphysically normative horizon, the stress upon practice by deleting the values of the contemplative life, and the inadequacy of his instrumentalist theory of knowledge (see Chiosso 2009).

We will confine ourselves to two fairly representative instances. In his monumental *Essai de philosophie pédagogique*, the Flemish educationalist Franz de Hovre, dedicates twelve pages to Dewey (de Hovre 1927: 87-99) and, moreover, a section to Kerschensteiner and Dewey (*Ibid.*: 115-6). de Hovre’s general viewpoint is stated in the introduction to his volume:

This book has the following object: the philosophical foundation of the Catholic doctrine of education and the educational foundation of the Catholic conception of life. The existence of a mutual relationship between the doctrine of education and philosophy of life represents the core thought of the entire work. (*Ibid.*: xiii)

When he comes to Dewey, after outlining his philosophy and educational theory, de Hovre recognizes that Dewey is a first-rate philosopher and educationalist but faults him for passing over in silence “the ideal foundations of Society” and for resolving “the individual in the social milieu” (*Ibid.*: 98). Dewey’s “capital defect” is detected in the “complete absence of any religious sense which could have cautioned him against all his one-sidednesses” (*Ibid.*). Among the defects of Dewey’s educational device, along with its “Americanism,” the influence of Rousseau is mentioned: de Hovre goes as far as to state that in reading Dewey one actually has the impression of reading Rousseau (*Ibid.*: 98). It is fairly a surprising remark: indeed, the limitations of Rousseau’s ideas are clearly discussed in Chapter 7 of *Democracy and Education* (see the paper of Avi Mintz in this symposium, which engages with the question also in reference to *Schools of To-morrow*). But – and this is even more striking – *Democracy and Education* is not even mentioned in de Hovre’s reconstruction, even if a section is dedicated to “Éducation traditionnelle et Démocratie” (*Ibid.*: 93). This omission is all the more remarkable because de Hovre shows a vast knowledge of Dewey’s works, including, for instance, *The Influence of Darwin on Philosophy*, the *Ethics* co-authored with Tufts, the *Essays in Experimental Logic*. We are not suggesting that de Hovre would have qualified his views on Dewey had he carefully studied *Democracy and Education*. As a matter of fact, de Hovre was among those contributing to the conceptual basis for the response to Dewey’s ideas within Catholic philosophical culture. The absence of any reference to *Democracy and Education* is, however, a sign that we cannot take for granted its role in Dewey’s influence the world over, also in the case of scholars who have a first-hand knowledge of Dewey’s works.

Jacques Maritain has been perhaps the most influential Neo-scholastic philosopher of the 20th century. His educational reflection should be considered not only as a major expression of the “perennialism in educational theory” (Gutek 2005: 248) but also as an ongoing confrontation with Deweyan theories. This is not by chance. The most important educational work of Maritain, *Education at the Crossroads* (1943), culminated in an appeal to American youth to break free from the instrumentalist and pragmatist philosophy. For Maritain, instrumentalism poses a threat to the democratization of American education – a trend he saw as one of the glories of US. Indeed, despite the fact that Dewey is recognized as a “great thinker” (Maritain 1943: 115), who “is able to maintain an ideal image of all those things which are dear to the heart of free men” (*Ibid.*), his philosophy is inadequate and risks lapsing into a “technocratic denial of the objective validity of any spiritual need.” Indeed, pragmatism is listed by Maritain as the third mistake of modern education and Dewey’s instrumentalist philosophy of knowledge is critiqued because “thinking begins, not only with difficulties but with insights [...]. Without trust in truth there is

no human effectiveness” (*Ibid.*: 13). Along with this epistemology-oriented critique, Maritain states as a primary concern that pragmatism cannot accommodate the human aspiration to interior freedom because it insists on the exclusively social character of the self. At the school level, by implicitly referring to Dewey’s definition of education as the reconstruction of experience (MW 9: 82), Maritain credits Dewey with the merit of having drawn our attention to the need to adapt the pedagogical methods to the pupil’s interests. He disapproves, however, of the lack of any reference to criteria on the basis of which to assess the aims and values of education (see also Valentine 2004).

Thus, Maritain – who, in fact, refers to Hutchins’s *The Higher Learning in America* (1936) in another part of his book – joins the American debate between Dewey and perennialists. If we take up in one picture, on the one hand, the European Catholic thinker speaking to an American audience and invoking a sure anchorage in the scholastic metaphysics in order to underpin the American democratic project and, on the other, the American pragmatist philosopher critically revisiting the European heritage in order to counter some trends of the American scene, we get a good sense of the trans-Atlantic give-and-take, which this symposium has endeavoured to explore in reference to *Democracy and Education*.

4. *A Trans-Atlantic Exchange: New Directions*

We have been speaking so far about a two-way exchange: Dewey’s American response in *Democracy and Education* to the European philosophical and pedagogical inheritance, and Europe’s uptake of Dewey’s response. If we are to understand *Democracy and Education*’s relevance for contemporary Europe, we now have to dig more deeply into the text – and discover how that work was itself a direct response to the specific European problematic situation of 1916.⁵

4.1. *Nationalism and Its Transcendence*

The belligerence between European nation states leading to World War One, and conflicts among ethnic groups within multi-ethnic nation states, dominated Dewey’s thought while writing *Democracy and Education* (see for example his “Internal social reorganization after the war” [MW 11: 73-86], and “What are we fighting for?” [MW 11: 98-106]). He saw nationalism as the root cause of these conflicts. His account goes as follows: 18th century *philosophes* condemned hierarchical social and political arrangements and like the ancient stoics, idealized a social organization of free individuals as wide as humanity. But they offered no concrete means for realizing this new order (MW 9: 98). 19th century German idealism filled this gap by assigning the task of ‘humanizing’ humanity to the “enlightened” nation state. The individual’s true realization would be achieved by absorbing the aims of the ‘organic’ nation state. In practice, however, state educational systems were instead shaped to supply

5. Some material in what follows is drawn from Waks 2007.

soldiers, workers, and administrators for the state, not to foster liberal individuality. Thus, Dewey concludes, “the ‘state’ was substituted for humanity; cosmopolitanism gave way to nationalism” (MW 9: 99). The enlightenment’s full and free interplay of all devolved into a limiting devotion to exclusive and belligerent states.

Dewey saw this situation as self-limiting. Nationalism, whether political, racial, or cultural, was simply “breaking down” under emerging conditions of global association, as he notes in *German Philosophy and Politics* (MW 8: 203). The sovereign nation state he saw as merely a transitory and problematic phase – “federated humanity” with its own institutions could no longer be seen as “a mere dream, an illusion of sentimental hope,” he argues in *Ethics* (MW 5: 431).

New conditions of association, especially air transportation, and global commerce and communications, were indeed leading to a “physical annihilation of space” as he puts it in *Democracy and Education* (MW 9: 92). Society is widening, thus weakening the efficiency and reach of received national institutions and making them less effective as guarantors of human rights (MW 5: 421-2).

Some transnational political institutions are thus both necessary and, in some form, inevitable. But so long as nation states act in isolation as competitors, transnational institutions can do no more than pick up the pieces after inevitable wars. We need something more, a positive ideal of “fruitful processes of cooperation” through the “furtherance of the breadth and depth of human intercourse” irrespective of class or race, geography or national boundaries (MW 8: 203-4).

4.2. A Transnational Educational Project

But how can a cooperative order be established when the instruments of education and public opinion remain in the hands of the very nation states that are the sources of the problem? Dewey’s answer to this question lies at the heart of his entire project in *Democracy and Education*. He argues that America is genuinely multi-national (and thus a *non-nation* state). In the modern American industrial city, we have a

diversity of populations, of varying languages, religions, moral codes and traditions [...], more primary communities, more differing environments of custom, tradition, aspiration and social control, than previously existed on an entire continent. (MW 9: 87-8)

We could, he argues in *German Philosophy and Politics*, take this “accident of our internal composition” and reshape it as a guide for building a multi-ethnic community at home that offers a model for voluntary emulation throughout the world (MW 8: 203).

The educational implications, worked out in *Democracy and Education*, are clear: because we are, as Dewey points out in *Nationalizing Education* (1916),

as a nation composed of representatives of all nations who have come here to live in peace [...] and to escape the enmities and jealousies (of) old-world nations, to nationalize our education means to make it an instrument [...] in the positive cultivation of sentiments of respect and friendship for all men and women *wherever they live*. (MW 10: 209; emphasis added)

This is accomplished as the school brings young people from multiple ethnic and cultural groups together for shared activities, so that the dispositions of each can reflect diverse influences and lead to a fusion (not of perspectives, but) of horizons (MW 9: 24-6).⁶ Bringing learners from diverse national and cultural groups together constitutes the necessary educational *context*. The very differences between learners – as displayed by their divergent outlooks (shaped by their different ethnic backgrounds) as they approach common tasks – are primary *subject matters*. The fusion of learners' horizons – their formation of capacities to shape common interests, project common ends, and converge upon common means despite different perspectives – is a primary educational *goal*.

4.3. Democracy and Education *and Transnational Europe*

All of this is aspirational. One hundred years after the publication of *Democracy and Education*, democratic education of this sort remains vastly incomplete in the United States and elsewhere. On the other hand, transnational institutions exist at regional and global levels. The once belligerent nations of Europe are now joined together in an economic and cultural community with its own political agencies. European citizens readily cross national borders to study, work, and enjoy recreational and cultural enrichment.⁷ Educational networks like *iversity.org*⁸ make courses from Europe's leading universities available online at no cost. Europe's metropolitan areas are as diverse as those of twentieth century American industrial cities, and new immigrants – and refugees – are arriving daily. What might *Democracy and Education* offer the European project of today? We offer two suggestions.

First, the normative coherence that nationalism provided for school and college curricula since the 18th and 19th centuries has been shattered by post-modernization, leaving behind only an empty ideology of educational "excellence" often advanced as a weapon of international competition (Readings 1996). As detailed in several of the articles in this special issue, like the United States, Europe, both in its several nations and as a transnational community, has arguably fallen into this trap with its

6. The term 'fusion of horizons,' which captures Dewey's meaning precisely, derives from Gadamer (1989), and has entered the discussion of multicultural education through Taylor (1994). Taylor explains: to approach an object or event of one culture with the value presuppositions and habits of another is to miss the point. We have to "learn to move in a broader horizon, within which what we have formally taken for granted as the background to evaluation can be situated as one possibility alongside the different background of the formerly unfamiliar culture. The 'fusion of horizons' operates through our developing new vocabularies of comparison, by means of which we can articulate these contrasts" (Taylor 1994: 67).

7. We wrote these lines before the Brexit referendum. The UK vote resonates with the passions and hopes of nationalist political leaders throughout Europe, who aim at turning back the hands of time, and introduces a note of uncertainty for the EU project. The main trends we have indicated here, albeit in an admittedly aspirational way, are nevertheless unlikely to undergo a substantial reversal. The new situation, however, does require further inquiries toward new understandings of the project of a transnational Europe.

8. *iversity.org* (<https://iversity.org/>) is a Europe-based on-line education platform, created by Jonas Liepmann and Hannes Klöpffer. It has operated since 2013 in the sector of higher education through on line courses and lectures mostly provided in English and German.

concerns for educational efficiency and performance as measured by standardized tests. Consider this statement:

Improving the quality and efficiency of education is at the centre of education policy debate at both national and EU level. It has a crucial role to play in Europe's Lisbon strategy to build its future prosperity and social cohesion. It lies at the heart of the EU's goals for education and training in the period up to 2020. It involves raising performance in compulsory education, in particular with regard to the high percentage of low-achieving 15-year-olds in reading, maths and science and more generally preparing young people for the knowledge society of the 21st century. In this context, reliable information on pupil performance is key to the successful implementation of targeted education policies and it is not surprising that in the past two decades national tests have emerged as an important tool for providing a measure of educational achievement. (Figel 2009: 3)

Re-situating European curriculum efforts within the project of European ideals and transnational democracy can restore normative validity for these efforts and provide some concrete direction for selection of common subject matters.

Second, Dewey's vision of education through intercultural communication as leading to a fusion of horizons can be of use in reconceiving democratic education within European nations. At the metropolitan level, *Democracy and Education* points toward innovative educational experiments, combining local schools, regional educational facilities, and the Internet, for activities where young people from diverse groups, including those most disadvantaged and excluded, at all educational levels, can intermingle in common physical or virtual spaces, at least periodically, for problem-based learning and ameliorative efforts to address significant common problems (Waks 2006).

Europe is now positioned as a transnational space capable of generating more genuinely cosmopolitan educational programs. Pilot efforts of both European nations and the European community can be emulated, and adapted to settings and conditions in other world regions. These various efforts can then – especially via Internet technology – communicate, share resources, and create rich informal and formal cooperative networks for democratic education.

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