

## **In London Street: The Dewey-Trotsky Encounter in Politics and Praxis**

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### **English Abstract**

No one who has looked closely can fail to see a remarkable congruency between the synthesis of ideas that represents the culmination of classical pragmatism, on the one hand, and Marx's early humanist program on the other. Despite this ground for potential commensurability, Trotsky and Dewey, while historical near-contemporaries, were fundamentally polar opposites; their contributions to "Their Morals and Ours," Dewey and Trotsky found themselves on opposing theoretical positions with regard to the idea that, as one student of socialism claims, "as certainty about the future dissipates, ethics becomes necessary." Despite the fact that one philosophized about civil society while the other acted in lieu of an established civil society, Dewey and Trotsky both recognized valid reasons for the crisis of public authority in Western liberalism. I argue that what unites the politics of Dewey with the early Marx, a view of praxis that demonstrates human intelligence as crystallized in social and technical practices, is precisely what Trotsky (and other Bolshevik leaders) abandoned in an effort to impose an over-intellectualized ideological framework on Russian society and culture. From this perspective, the Bolshevik experiment was bound to fail. The reasons for this entail lessons for how to address the "democratic deficit" in Western politics in general today.

### **Resumen en español**

Nadie que haya mirado de cerca se puede dejar de ver una congruencia notable entre la síntesis de las ideas que representa la culminación del pragmatismo clásico, por un lado, y pronto programa humanista de Marx sobre el otro. A pesar de este motivo de conmensurabilidad potencial, Trotsky y Dewey, mientras históricos casi contemporáneos, eran fundamentalmente opuestos polares, y sus contribuciones a Su moral y la nuestra, Dewey y Trotsky se encuentran en posiciones opuestas teóricas con respecto a la idea de que, como un estudiante de socialismo sostiene que "la mayor certidumbre sobre el futuro se disipa, la ética se convierte en necesario." A pesar del hecho de que uno filosofado acerca de la sociedad civil, mientras que el otro actúa en lugar de una sociedad establecida civil, Dewey y Trotsky, ambos reconocidos razones válidas para la crisis de la autoridad pública en el liberalismo occidental. Yo sostengo que lo que une a la política de Dewey con el joven Marx, una visión de la praxis demuestra que la inteligencia humana como cristalizado en las prácticas sociales y técnicos, es precisamente lo que Trotsky (y otros líderes bolcheviques) abandonada en un esfuerzo por imponer una sobre-intellectualizado marco ideológico sobre la sociedad y la cultura rusas. Desde esta perspectiva, el experimento bolchevique estaba condenado al fracaso. Las razones para esto implicaría lecciones de cómo hacer frente al "déficit democrático" en la política occidental en general hoy en día.

## Resumo em português

Ninguém que tenha olhado de perto pode deixar de ver uma congruência notável entre a síntese de idéias que representa o culminar de pragmatismo clássico, por um lado, e um programa de início de Marx humanista sobre o outro. Apesar deste terreno para comensurabilidade potencial, Trotsky e Dewey, enquanto quase-históricos contemporâneos, eram opostos fundamentalmente polares; suas contribuições para a sua moral ea nossa, Trotsky Dewey e encontraram-se na oposição posições teóricas em relação à idéia de que, como um estudante de socialismo afirma, "como certeza sobre as futuras se dissipa, a ética torna-se necessário." Apesar do fato de que uma filosofou sobre a sociedade civil, enquanto o outro agiu no lugar de uma sociedade estabelecida civil, Dewey e Trotsky ambos reconhecidos razões válidas para a crise de autoridade pública no liberalismo ocidental. Defendo que o que une a política de Dewey com o jovem Marx, uma visão da práxis que demonstra inteligência humana como cristalizado nas práticas sociais e técnicas, é precisamente o que Trotsky (e outros líderes bolcheviques) abandonado em um esforço para impor uma sobre-intelectualizada quadro ideológico na sociedade russa e cultura. A partir desta perspectiva, a experiência bolchevique foi obrigado a falhar. As razões para isso implica lições de como lidar com o "défice democrático" na política do Ocidente em geral hoje.

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No one who has looked closely can fail to see a remarkable congruency between the synthesis of ideas that represents the culmination of classical pragmatism, on the one hand, and Marx's early humanist program on the other. We can see this most clearly in C.I. Lewis's concise summation of pragmatism:

Pragmatism could be characterized as the doctrine that all problems are at bottom problems of conduct, that all judgments are, implicitly, judgments of value, and that, as there can be ultimately no valid distinction of theoretical and practical, so there can be no final separation of questions of truth of any kind from questions of the justifiable ends of action.[1]

Despite this ground for potential commensurability, Trotsky and Dewey, while historical near-contemporaries, were fundamentally polar opposites, not only on their views of communism and revolutionary social change, but equally in terms of background, personality, life experiences, and temperament. It is doubtful whether there is much of comparative philosophical worth to be learned from Dewey and Trotsky's single exchange of ideas, ostensibly about "dirty hands" in politics, published as *Their Morals and Ours*. [2] In their contributions to Novack's book as liberal, public intellectual and as revolutionary leader, respectively, Dewey and Trotsky found themselves on opposing theoretical positions with regard to the idea that, as one student of socialism claims, "as certainty about the future dissipates, ethics becomes necessary." [3]

Any comparison between two such dissimilar figures as Dewey and Trotsky must center on some Archimedean point from which divergence in either direction through intellectual history can be traced. There are at the very least three such points in this case: Aristotelian politics and ethics, Hegel's dialectic and critique of liberalism, and Anglo-American *laissez-faire* liberalism itself. Bypassing the fact that entire books have already been written on these philosophical lynchpins already, it makes the most sense to trace a thread common to all these pertinent to our subject: the idea of social critique as an immanent, rather than a transcendent, enterprise. Despite the fact that one philosophized about civil society while the other acted in lieu of an established civil society, Dewey and Trotsky both recognized valid reasons for the crisis of public authority in Western liberalism.[4] While Dewey's slogan "the cure for democracy's ills is more democracy" is not necessarily incompatible with Trotsky's indictment of bourgeois democracy, there are as many valid criticisms of the incompleteness of Dewey's theory of democracy as there are contradictions in Trotsky's encouragement of grass-roots democratic political action in Russia in the first two decades of the twentieth century.

Perhaps the best way of respecting both Dewey's focus on individuality and community in the corporate state while also acknowledging Trotsky's commitment to revolutionary social change is to frame our inquiry in terms of sociologist David Sciulli's criticism that "the original restraints on arbitrary government codified in Western constitutional tradition" no longer operate "*because they were never extended, in practice, to the task of restraining at least purposefully arbitrary exercises of collective power by private enterprises within civil society.*"[5] Given this problem, there is reason to confront recent efforts to effect a rapprochement between Deweyan and post-Marxist theories of radical democracy (here I have in mind Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau), and in particular to legitimize the latter's constructivist notion that "the normal state in pluralist democracies" should be "articulations of quarrel, dissent, and antagonistic interests." This may not be an appropriate political solution in the context of recent U.S. history, particularly given the resurgence of social conservatism. This is because social fragmentation in a pluralistic democracy is subject to exploitation by conservative elements so that "the very democratic attitudes and institutions that guarantee the possibility of controversial articulations" are put at risk; religious fundamentalism and the Tea Party movement are only two examples of this.[6]

The question then is, how to effect institutional reform to extend the values of substantive, and not merely formal, equality and democracy to a plutocratic civil society under the conditions of reasonable pluralism? Public intellectuals of pragmatist leanings who are intent on seizing Dewey's injunction that "philosophy is or ought to become the criticism of criticisms directed toward fostering enlightened change and social reconstruction"[7] cannot only help to create, in Cohen's and Arato's words, "a new conception of civil society that can reflect the core of new collective identities and articulate the terms within with projects based on such identities can contribute to the emergence of freer, more democratic societies." They can champion a practical public philosophy and assist in the design of interlocking educative institutions to keep this philosophy whole. What unites the politics of Dewey with the early Marx, a view of

*praxis* that demonstrates human intelligence as crystallized in social and technical practices, is precisely what Trotsky (and other Bolshevik leaders) abandoned in an effort to impose an over-intellectualized ideological framework on Russian society and culture. From this perspective, the Bolshevik experiment was bound to fail. The reasons why bear lessons for how to address the “democratic deficit” in Western politics in general today.

I

Just as there would have been no pragmatism without British empiricism, the critical social theories of Marx and Dewey would have had no impetus without British liberalism. “The scaffolding of Marx’s argument,” writes Adam B. Ulam, one of the most acute interpreters of Bolshevik intellectual history,

discloses Marx the romantic assailing the contemporary society for its preoccupation with money; Marx the materialist rejecting moralistic and idealistic solutions as fraudulent; and finally Marx the Hegelian reconciling the two conflicting principles by a march of history that, through an evolution of material forces, brings freedom for the first time within the grasp of mankind.[8]

This description resonates with the moral tone of the “radicalizing experience” of Dewey’s experiences through the Chicago Pullman Porter’s Strike in 1894, as described by Robert Westbrook in his excellent political biography of Dewey. The Pullman strike “opened to view the moral shortcomings of a paternalistic brand of ‘welfare capitalism’ which failed to cultivate workers’ capacity for autonomous participation in social life.”[9]

Key to Dewey’s view of economic justice is an interpretation of democracy as organic in his 1888 essay “The Ethics of Democracy”: “Society, as a real whole, is the normal order,” Dewey claimed, “and the mass as an aggregate of isolated units is the fiction. If this be the case, and if democracy be a form of society, it not only does have, but must have, a common will; for it is this unity of will which makes it an organism. A state represents men so far as they have become organically related to one another, or are possessed of unity of purpose and interest.”[10] Axel Honneth is perhaps right to say of “The Ethics of Democracy” that the way Dewey “allows—in accordance with his organism analogy—democratic self-administration to emerge directly from voluntary cooperation resembles the democracy ideal of the young Marx to such a degree that [Dewey’s view] must inadvertently share all of its weaknesses too.”[11] However, the implications of these early views in calling for a political order in service of the development of individuals unites Dewey, at least on the subject of the social conditions of mutual recognition, with both Hegel and Marx, all of whom “did not see protest against poverty as expressing a failing of character such as envy or as reflecting an unreasonable sense of what is due to individuals,” according to Alan Gilbert. “Instead, these political demands articulate a common good, identifying currently unattainable minimum conditions for realizing [moral] personality.”[12]

It is thus significant to note, as Richard Bernstein does, that for both Dewey and Marx, “social praxis becomes the dominant category” of philosophy.[13] Dewey and the Marx of the 1844 *Manuscripts* also share a complex, anti-foundationalist and “bootstrapping” view of human nature in which “our practical activity shapes the entire range of our human activities, including our cognitive functions, and ... this practical activity is itself shaped by social institutions in which we participate.”[14] Social criticism thus occurs in the mid-stride of lived experience, rather than based on a fundamental set of principles of human nature or a perfectionist ideal of the goal of practical activity.

Critical social theory, on the Deweyan view, is therefore better characterized with the emphasis on ongoing *praxis* rather than product. It is easy to forget this, particularly when we examine the central place of coordinating principles such as “organism” and “continuity” in, among other places, *Experience and Nature*, where there seems to be little doubt that Dewey seems committed to a “metaphysical” naturalism, as Richard Gale has indicated.[15] Moreover, the focus of some interpreters of Dewey on the epistemic product of experimental procedures designed along the lines of the physical sciences has obscured the kinship that scientific praxis bears—kinship that Dewey himself stresses most explicitly in *Logic: Theory of Inquiry*—to intelligent processes of practice and craftsmanship that aim more at what Aristotle would have called *techné* and *areté* than *epistémê*. I add *areté* here because I am keen, if possible, to show that it is no longer acceptable to interpret Dewey’s naturalism in a Baconian sense, as Boisvert does when he claims that “Nature, for Dewey, is a ‘challenge’; the natural beings which surround us are ‘interrogations.’”[16] The key environmental virtue of sustainability is unlikely to be made compatible with a Baconian view of technology and nature. Instead, we should turn to the sociology of material culture, and in particular the recent work of Richard Sennett,[17] which has created a background of research highly congenial to the framework of Dewey’s views of the economy of action, self-correction, and consummatory experience.

Lessons learned from the Pullman strike and the increasingly visible, and sometimes violent labor movement in the early 20th century, Dewey was readied in *Individualism, Old and New, Liberalism and Social Action*, and a host of essays and *New Republic* articles to apply a distinctive sort of consequentialist political analysis that contrasted not so much means and ends of capitalist production, but the ideal ends of modern economic and political theory with the conditions actually produced by institutionalization of those ends. “If the early liberals had put forth their special interpretation of liberty as something subject to historic relativity,” he writes, in one prime example of this, “they would not have frozen it into a doctrine to be applied at all times under all social circumstances. Specifically, they would have recognized that effective liberty is a function of the social conditions existing at any time.”[18] Dewey made precisely the same criticism of institutional Marxism in *Freedom and Culture*, observing regretfully that no doctrinal principles that are supposed to be directly action guiding for public policy, particularly those affecting such a large number of people, “can obviate the need for continued resort to observation, and to continual revision of generalizations in their office of working hypotheses.”[19]

The reasoning behind Dewey's rejection of both libertarian liberalism and structural Marxism—often referred to as his theory of “radical democracy”—is perhaps the most compelling features of his political theory. Because “radical democracy” is a proposal for rethinking our existing polity, it has a pragmatic advantage over any “political theory that asks questions solely about what sort of polity we ought to have or what it might mean to have a different sort of polity” because this “is a political theory disconnected from actual political life in the Western industrialized societies.”[20] The sense in which Dewey is a “radical,” perhaps uniquely in the political sense of this adjective, is that he abjures the methods of revolution in favor of what might be called a politics centered on the ideal of “permanent reconstruction,” the view that democracy is not only an unfinished project, but must *always* be so if it is to be a genuine democracy. This imposes a surprising number of constraints on power and policy in the democratic process, and imposes ideal constraints on what counts as public reasoning.[21]

## II

“Permanent reconstruction,” an ongoing, progressivist program for encouraging certain beliefs and attitudes in citizens and constructing flexible and educative institutions, is a vital part of Dewey's non-reductive naturalism, which has been much misunderstood.[22] As a naturalist, he is not easily cast in terms of the “naturalists that we all now are,” to paraphrase the words of Peter Winch. Nonetheless, Dewey's naturalism, properly framed, allows a clear understanding of the status of Marxism as a science, and thus the epistemic status of claims based on Marxian economics and his revolutionary socialist program. Because this more expansive naturalism is not framed solely in terms of the logic of the natural sciences, but rather the “logic of inquiry” (which can encompass both the social sciences and pre-scientific or intelligent inquiry generally), Dewey could thus steer clear of the wholesale rejection of social control held, for example, by Karl Popper, who saw the greatest flaw of Marxism in its non-falsifiability. Even Sidney Hook fell into closely equating the logic of Marxism and natural science when he claimed, in *Toward an Understanding of Karl Marx*, that the enterprise of science is essentially “classless.” His teacher, Dewey, though did not “view natural science as wholly apart from the historical determination of the structure of the social formation in which scientists carry out their work,” and the self-reflective enterprises of the social sciences in fact encourage us to “distinguish the content of scientific claims from the status of its aims or methods,” where the former can be held to be truthful even if the latter are neither value neutral nor absolutely objective.[23]

In historical context, the status of Marxism as a science was a topic much debated by students of Dewey like Hook and Max Eastman, who took opposing views on the topic.[24] James Burnham, who disagreed with Eastman's critique of Marx and Engels' work as unscientific, metaphysical and even religious, wrote that

although they described history as operating according to scientific laws, Marx and Engels never contended that social development was completely self-acting

and self-operating. What Marx argued was that the wills of individual humans are not decisive factors; history provides a general context for and defines the scope and limitations of human action.[25]

What Burnham, Hook and Eastman were lucky enough by historical circumstance to operate with, and what Marx and Engels unlucky not to have, was a conception of science as probabilistic, offering predictions applicable to populations but not to individuals.[26] This is, of course, a way of viewing the social or behavioral sciences, as distinct from the governing presuppositions of the natural sciences, a path that receives wide methodological approval today from such diverse corners as feminism and critical realism.

Alan Ryan summarizes Dewey's objections to communism as three-fold: its doctrinal hostility to liberal individualism, its theory of class war (which, according to Dewey, was more likely to produce fascism than socialism), and, most practically, the absurdity of its chances of success in the United States.[27] Hook's and Dewey's criticisms of the anti-individualism of Russian communism are fundamentally sound, if nonetheless alienated from key points of the historical context. In many ways, the philosophy of Russian communism capitalized on a chord already existing in Russia, for better or for worse. What Trotsky bemoaned as the symbol of the "barbarous 'log cabin' of Russian history"[28] was the age-old Russian tradition of the peasant *obshchina*, which is "a type of communal organization based on joint ownership of arable and meadow" that nineteenth century Slavophiles pointed to as "proof that the Russian people, allegedly lacking in the acquisitive 'bourgeois' impulses of western Europeans, were destined to solve mankind's social problems." [29] Analysis of the resistance of Russian peasants to the break-up of communes during the reforms of Premier Stolypin in 1906 indicates a wide and deep communitarian ethic opposed to individualism; at the time, rural agricultural labor accounted for three-quarters of Russia's population.[30] In the agrarian revolution in Russia that followed the events of "Red October," Stolypin's reforms were, ironically, reversed and communes once again reformed despite Bolshevik's desires to the contrary. The new regime did not initially oppose this because, as historian Richard Pipes points out, "the commune for them performed the same functions that it had under tsarism—namely, guaranteeing fulfillment of obligations to the state." [31]

In this regard, it is unfortunate that the mature Trotsky's own views on public life were fundamentally shaped by the instrumentalism of the natural sciences: public life, to him, was a social process "shaped according to its own laws," which are "subject to an objective sociological analysis whose aim should be to acquire the ability to foresee and to master the fate of society." [32] Despite this, Trotsky continued to have a more theoretically expansive view with regard to the application of Marxist ideas than many other Soviet leaders. It was "fallacious to presume that Marxism, as a social science, offered a 'universal master key' to the physical universe; such a presumption," he claimed, "meant 'ignoring all other spheres of learning.'" [33] In a series of letters and articles written directly or indirectly in response to the aforementioned Burnham and

Eastman and published as *In Defense of Marxism*, the philosophically *naïf* Trotsky employed a remarkable Aristotelian/Hegelian strategy for explaining the Marxian dialectic. The strategy, as reported by Baruch Knei-Paz, is worth repeating here at length:

Thus he [Trotsky] reverted to the old Aristotelian logic about “A” never being equal to “A”; all things exist in time, time never stops and existence itself is therefore a permanent process of transformation. From this logic it was merely a step for him to the notion of the dialectic, according to which at a certain point quantitative changes have qualitative consequences; this was true of chemical phenomena as well as those of physics and biology. ‘Dialectical’ processes, therefore, are to be found in nature; quantity and quality are there, as are the reconciliation between opposites and development through contradictions. Thus from the syllogisms of Aristotle’s logic we arrive at the ‘laws’ of Hegelian dialectics.[34]

All that is required to complete the movement from “pure becoming” to a Marxist version of emergentism is to dispense with the Hegelian, idealist interpretation of the dialectic and accurately explain the “material character” of the historical dialectical processes.

This step is made through adopting the Hegelian sense of what constitutes a “science” over the empiricist or positivist sense. For Dewey, this sense broadly takes “nature as a *totality or system* [as] an expression of thought,”[35] the investigation of the particulars of which are guided by intelligence, or reason, as “a scheme of working out the meanings of convictions in terms of one another and of the consequences they import in further experience, convictions are the more, not the less, amenable and responsible to the full exercise of reason.”[36] Because this sense of science does not make a methodological distinction (as, say, the Aristotelian tradition does) between inquiries that are speculative as opposed to those that are practical, this sense of science also lends itself to becoming “a regulative method of an organized social life” in service of overcoming a “disintegrative individualism.”[37]

### III

While agreeing with these presuppositions, Russian revolutionary *praxis*, by its very nature, disengaged itself from the Hegelian guiding thread I suggested earlier as common to Marx and Dewey—that of immanent social critique. By doing so, they turned their backs on the possibility of generating standards for normative social criticism out of the existing practices—and the admitted exploitation of those practices—of the agrarian poor, the artisan class, and the urban industrial laborers (this is in distinct contrast with home-grown Russian populism and agrarian socialism, for instance the *Zemlya i Volya* movement[38]). The importance of this for the overall point of this paper is that Bolshevik Social Democracy essentially forsook *praxis* for theory, heedless of Marx’s own interest in subversively conflating these. For his part, Trotsky’s own Marxist social theory repeatedly recycled only a handful of themes. One of these was the backwardness of Russian civil society, which had been identified by Engels as providing

conditions for a bourgeois but not a proletarian revolution.[39] The square pegs of the Russian peasant, proletarian, and capitalist did not easily fit into the round holes of historical materialism, it seemed.

In his reflections on the ultimately, unsuccessful 1905 Revolution, Trotsky pointed to a fairly small Russian class who profited from quick and limited industrialization, mostly in the west of the country, “foreign capital” and “European financiers,” on the one hand, and “local entrepreneurs grown rich as a result of the industrial boom” on the other, and both were supporters of the tsarist *status quo*. [40] In advance of Gramsci’s meditations on hegemony, the early Trotsky treated capitalism as not merely a set of economic arrangements, but an entire social and cultural system. “The backbone of [liberal] revolution is not the industrial baron, but the self-made middle classes who in the course of a long period succeed in penetrating the social organism and whose existence in fact transforms social life,” claims Baruch Knei-Paz about this theory. Although not as well known as his more famous doctrine of “uneven and combined development,” Trotsky’s views on the inadequate revolutionary potential of the peasantry and the dangers of a “liberal” bourgeois revolution with its quasi-hegemonic cultural support are both important ancillaries to that theory.[41]

In “Three Concepts of the Russian Revolution,” he approvingly cited a 1905 article in which Lenin expressly disavows both the possibility and the desirability of the “democratic dictatorship” that a purely peasant-led revolution would entail. Lenin wrote:

That would be not a socialist, but a democratic dictatorship. It would not be able to dispose of ... the foundations of capitalism. At best, it would be able to introduce a radical redistribution of land ownership for the benefit of the peasantry; carry out a consistent and complete democratization, including a republic; uproot all the oppressive Asiatic characteristics in the life of the factory as well as the village; lay down the beginnings of important improvements in the condition of the workers; raise their standard of living; and finally, last but not least, carry the revolutionary conflagration into Europe.[42]

This is a remarkable rejection that illustrates the single-mindedness and lack of compromise by which Lenin pursued revolutionary politics. It is noteworthy that the context in which it is used is within a preface to a damning biography of Stalin composed at a point at which Trotsky, in exile, was warring with the Soviet dictator over the very meaning of Russian history itself for the mantle of Lenin’s legitimate successor.

This reversal of fortune is remarkable given that between the 1905 and 1917, Trotsky had spent more time actively speaking to and learning from the left intelligentsia of Europe than Lenin, making him the most cosmopolitan of the later Bolshevik leaders. His antagonism to Lenin’s idea of the SD party as being a small, highly disciplined “vanguard of the proletariat” stemmed from thoughts in a 1904 pamphlet entitled *Our Political Tasks*. There, Trotsky had identified the phenomenon of “substitutism” (*zamestitelstvo*) as being the reason for preferring a broadly based party modeled on European social democratic parties to Lenin’s “Jacobin” Bolshevik faction.

“Lenin’s methods lead to this,” Trotsky wrote, “the party organization [the caucus] at first substitutes itself for the party as a whole; then the Central Committee substitutes itself for the organization; and finally a single ‘dictator’ substitutes himself for the Central Committee.” To this, he opposed the model in which “the party must seek the guarantee of its stability in its own base, in an active and self-reliant proletariat, and not in its top caucus, which the revolution...may suddenly sweep away with its wing.”[43] Even the most untutored student of Soviet political history will realize Trotsky’s accurate prediction of Lenin’s consolidation of power and Stalin’s own dictatorial rise in these words.

Trotsky’s most distinctive contribution to Marxist revolutionary theory, the idea of “permanent revolution,” is founded on predominance of the dictatorship of the proletariat over the peasantry, which would, by leading both a democratic and a socialist revolution in Russia, spur on the international socialist movement. This eye toward the International was what largely distinguished Trotsky as a theorist from the combative and alienating Lenin and the policy of “socialism in one country” of Stalin. The idea was that “only the victory of the proletariat in the West could protect Russia from bourgeois restoration and assure it the possibility of rounding out the establishment of socialism.”[44] Although the insights of “permanent revolution” have the dual advantage of guarding against all-too-typical Marxist overconfidence in the historical inevitability of revolution as well as couching the tactics of the struggle of the Russian proletariat in a larger and therefore more pluralistic European strategy, their very “global” nature makes them an “argument for breaking down the barriers between programs for limited democratic reforms and the struggle for workers’ power.”[45] On the other hand, the basic idea behind permanent revolution—that the struggles of workers in one country are not truly concluded until the struggles of all workers are ended—forms one basis today for a socialist cosmopolitan that is reflected in contemporary critical theory’s “transnational democracy” movement.[46]

This sidelining of democratic reform can also be seen in the gradual Bolshevik takeover of the worker’s soviets throughout the early 1920s. The “socialism from below” of the soviets had received Trotsky’s unflagging support since the brief success of the 1905 revolution, but the theory of permanent revolution was specifically framed to hedge against the possibility of capitalist restoration, not further democracy. And even a cursory glance at the unremitting pressures on the early Bolshevik regime reveals the reasons for privileging efficacy of the new government over representative legitimacy: the bloody inheritance of the First World War, in which Russian involvement and the loss of more than three million military and civilian casualties had been ended only by the 1917 Revolution; the former Russian Empire owed 8 billion rubles in war debts, and as a result, inflation soared and the nation’s gold reserves were nearly gone; no sooner had the Bolsheviks begun to consolidate power than civil war broke out in November, 1917, with fighting between Reds and Whites along a vast front running through eastern Russia and the Ukraine. The explicit goal of White generals such as Kornilov and Denikin was the restoration of the tsar, which fired Trotsky’s worries even more extensively about the need to convince European radicals to act in their own countries

to reinforce the Russian success. The Civil War further devastated a countryside already wracked by war, leading to more than 2,000 pogroms against Jews and an extraordinarily severe famine in 1921 that the Soviet government was powerless to do anything about. Add to this foreign intervention, including the famous Czech Legion and American soldiers deployed in the far east of the country poised to take advantage of a potential White counter-revolution, and you have a recipe for a severe democratic deficit.

The tipping point at which Trotsky's hopes of maintaining his own independent strain of ideological leadership within the party occurred as early as 1921, when he, in effect, discarded his own single most important contribution to the theory of socialist revolution apart from the "permanent revolution": he was put in a position of having to become the chief advocate of Bolshevik "substitutism" for the desires of the working class. "Substitutism" had been the watchword of all of Trotsky's early criticisms of Russian liberalism, the ideals of bourgeois revolutionaries, and even of Lenin, for a time. Trotsky's biographer Isaac Deutscher writes:

The revolution had now reached that crossroads, well known to Machiavelli, at which it found it difficult or impossible to fix the people in their revolutionary persuasion and was driven 'to take such measures that, when they believed no longer, it might be possible to make them believe by force.' For the Bolshevik Party this involved a conflict of loyalties, which was in some respects deeper than any it had known so far, a conflict bearing the seeds of all the turbulent controversies and somber purges of the next decades.[47]

For Trotsky, this conflict involved both a betrayal of the radicalized Kronstadt sailors, whom he had twice previously supported against all odds,[48] and a party-dictated defense of "complete state control over the working classes" through the New Economic Policy. "He hoped to *persuade* people that they needed no government by persuasion," Deutscher writes. "He told them that the workers' state had the right to use forced labor; and he was sincerely disappointed that they did not rush to enroll in the labor camps." [49] While any assessment of Trotsky's legacy should be tempered by this string of poor judgments in constructing a new political culture for Russia, he of course cannot be held responsible for ignorance of theoretical developments in radical socialism after his own time. Yet the fact remains that in the 1970s and 80s under "late capitalism," the single-minded Bolshevik focus on the key role of the dictatorship of the proletariat was discarded in the light of three major theoretical advancements: (1) the discovery that, in the industrial state, there is no necessary correspondence between economics and politics, and so the connection between "base" and "superstructure" is tenuous at best; (2) the equally powerful notion that there is no necessary relation between the working class and socialism—dissolving the strong link between "class" and "consciousness", and, perhaps most importantly for the radical left after the events of 1989, the broad consensus that "socialism is in any case concerned with universal human goals which transcend the narrowness of material class interests." [50]

## IV

The decade between 1928 and 1938 is key for assessing the most relevant implications for today of Dewey's and Trotsky's grappings with the problems of public authority and civil society. For most of this time, Trotsky had been removed from his responsibilities and forced to assume his position as leader of the Left Opposition in exile, architect and victim of a "political culture [that] had developed no effective mechanisms for allowing errant sheep back into the fold," as Stalin-era historian Sheila Fitzpatrick puts it.[51] Dewey had visited the Soviet Union in 1928 and published his generally favorable reports on culture, education and society in the *New Republic*. Other invitees to the "Great Experiment," mostly American and European leftists, witnessed remarkable changes occurring in the next few years:

At the end of the 1920s, less than one-fifth of the population was urban. This figure would rise to one-third by the end of the 1930s. The total wage- and salary-earning workforce in the late 1920s stood at 11 million, out of a population of about 150 million. This figure would triple in the course of a decade. Eleven million was also the figure for children in school in the late 1920s, of whom 3 million were in secondary schools. A decade later, there were 30 million children in school, 18 million of them in secondary schools. Only 57 percent of the total Soviet population aged 9 to 49 was literate according to the 1926 census, although illiteracy was concentrated in Russia's rural regions and the Central Asian republics, and the Soviet urban literacy rate stood at 81 percent. In 1939, the same proportion (81 percent) of the *whole* Soviet population was literate.[52]

These are remarkable social and economic changes, engineered largely without the tragedies that followed the later Chinese experiments of the Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution.

Trotsky received no credit for any of this, but was blamed for a number of things he did not do. By 1938, Trotsky had been cleared by Dewey's Commission of the accusations of Stalin's minions, who held that Trotsky was both consorting with the Germans—at least up to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 1939—as well as "wrecking" or "intentional sabotage of the Soviet economy by [those]...who were secret enemies of Soviet power." [53] Dewey would have followed the Soviet reports of the Moscow "Frame-Up" Trials, weighing the costs of the extraordinary advances of Soviet culture—surely examples of intelligent planning and social control at work—against the costs to the freedom of Zinoviev, Kamenev, and the unnamed hundreds of thousands sent to gulags. As a response to the transformation of liberatory communism into repressive Stalinism and to address the pressures of fascist- and communist-led polemics exposing the flaws of liberal democracy, he wrote *Freedom and Culture*.

This 1938 text is an explicit effort by Dewey to describe the contours of a yet-unrealized democratic political civil society. In my view, *Freedom and Culture* supplies the positive and reconstructive element corresponding to the consequentialist political analysis that I mentioned early, in which ideal ends are critically contrasted with the

institutionalization of those ends for a polity. As is typical for all of Dewey's political works, the shape of educative institutions or "principles of justice" are intentionally left only vaguely elucidated, respecting Dewey's methodological commitment to his audience's *participation* in the actual reconstruction of liberal democracy. In the context of these works, we can see that pragmatist critical social theory is better characterized in terms of ongoing *praxis* rather than product. That is, it encourages "permanent reconstruction" of economic and social arrangements through the creation of inclusive deliberative forums and intelligent social control. This is the nature of Dewey's "radical" politics—a radicalism of means, not ends, that completely undermines the criticisms, for example, of Raymond Geiger in Dewey's *Library of Living Philosophers* volume: "[I]n the political dimension, "experiments"—shall we cite the Chamberlain experiment of appeasement or the Hitler experiment of getting-away-with-it as "scientific" examples—begin to appear absurd or tragic. Yet why is this the case?"[54] It may seem obviously fallacious to suggest, as Geiger does, that political experimentation is a bad thing because it has led, on some occasions, to bad consequences. Yet political experimentation, as a form of collective praxis aimed not only at the ends-in-view of incrementally improving lifestyles and educative institutions, but also the personal transformation and moral development of its citizens, is the antithesis of political conservatism in the west, for whom the word "reform" is synonymous with "market deregulation." To counteract the worst effect of neoliberal governance in the United States, what is required is not only these efforts, but also a "neo-Progressive" national effort by liberals and radicals, as Michael Dorf and Charles Sabel put it, to "(re)politicize political institutions by introducing a novel form of deliberation based on the diversity of practical activity, not the dispassionate homogeneity of those insulated from everyday experience."[55]

This "re-politicization" itself is a moral act on a national scale, echoing 1888's "The Ethics of Democracy" and many passages from *Freedom and Culture*, including this one:

[T]he source of the American democratic tradition is moral ... because based on faith in the ability of human nature to achieve freedom for individuals accompanied with respect and regard for other persons and with social stability built on cohesion instead of coercion. Since the tradition is an amoral one, attacks upon it, however they are made, wherever they come from, from within or from without, involve moral issues and can be settled only upon moral grounds.  
[56]

There can be no doubt that many in Dewey's reading public would have been uncomfortable in being asked to endorse these views, while at the same time supporting an alliance between the scientific and democratic methods. This discomfort was most likely to be felt by those who, like Dewey, saw "radical democracy" as the correct practical conclusion for moral premises such as social justice and personal flourishing but who, unlike Dewey, saw scientific methodology as a value-neutral,

apolitical practice. And this perspective continues to be an impediment today to the wider adoption of pragmatist views in political theory.

By contrast, the problem of defining the contours of a *praxis-oriented* naturalism expansive enough to encompass the commonalities of scientific and ethical-political inquiry and of making this concept useful as a unique and promising program for research is similar to a central problem posed by Thomas Dalton in his biography of Dewey. He writes, “[T]he scientific promise of Dewey’s pragmatism remains unfulfilled because scholars who wish to defend Dewey’s aesthetics or his experiential, democratic conception of community are unwilling also to include Dewey’s experimentalism, developmentalism, and conceptions of inquiry in that endeavor.”[57] Such a concept of practical naturalism would not only allow the generalized commitment to Dewey’s various theories that Dalton is skeptical about, but more specifically seems like a promising bridge between the “method-centered” and “lived experience” readings of Dewey.[58] The elaboration of a practical or pragmatic naturalism, in sum, does not require re-acclimating outmoded and largely pre-modern theories, for example dualism, to the context of physical sciences; it instead demands three-point research projects initially spelled out quite clearly in Larry Hickman’s *John Dewey’s Pragmatic Technology*: (1) the reconstruction of the distinction between “fine” art and “useful” artifacts; (2) the concrete demonstration that “productive skills that are pre-scientific and those that are scientific exist along a continuum of ever more complex and fruitful articulation of instrumentation in the broad sense of that term”; and (3) elaboration of the distinction between private motives and objective purposes found in Dewey and Hook, where objective purposes being, of course, central to establishing the intentional states characteristic of the phenomenological approach to naturalism made so clear in *Experience and Nature*. [59]

Correspondingly, we can find a Marx who is amenable to this practical naturalism and a socialist who is most respectful of concrete, “diverse practical activity.” This Marx, critical of the “dispassionate homogeneity of those insulated from everyday experience” is found in the 1844 *Paris Manuscripts*. He concludes the section “The Meaning of Human Requirements” with an indictment of political economy as “reduc[ing] everything (just as does politics in its [*Declaration of the*] *Rights of Man*) to man, i.e., to the individual whom he strips of all determinateness so as to class him as capitalist or worker.”[60] It is fruitless to speculate, but reading this Marx might have given pause to the judgments of a Trotsky whose failure of nerve not only suppressed the grass-roots democracy of the soviets, but devalued the communal praxis of the peasant *obshchina* and substituted the political agenda of his small revolutionary party for a potential alliance across Russian classes, united by common *techné* and *areté* rather than a tragically mistaken view of the historical inevitability of victories based on “scientific” Marxism-Leninism.

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## Notes

[1] Lewis, "Logical Positivism and Pragmatism," *Collected Papers*, 108.

[2] Trotsky, Dewey and George Novack, *Their Morals and Ours* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1969).

[3] Geoffrey Alan Kurtz, "The Political Thought of Jean Jaurès," unpublished PhD dissertation, Rutgers University 2007, 21; Kurtz explains, "Marx's confidence in a future state of perfect freedom and perfect solidarity would need to give way to an understanding that a liberal socialist movement would need to pursue its ends because it understands those ends to be *right*, to be justified by an ethic independent of all teleological expectations. It would need to abandon the hope of future perfection in favor of an amelioristic engagement with the imperfect present," 23.

[4] Thus Dewey in *Liberalism and Social Action*: "No one has ever seen more clearly than the Benthamites that the political self-interest of rulers, if not socially checked and controlled, leads to actions that destroy liberty for the mass of people. Their perception of this fact was a chief ground for their advocacy of representative government, for they saw in this measure a means by which the self-interest of the rulers would be forced into conformity with the interests of their subjects. But they had no glimpse of the fact that private control of the new forces of production, forces which affect the life of every one, would operate in the same way as private unchecked control of political power. They saw the need of new legal institutions, and of different political conditions as a means to political liberty. But they failed to perceive that social control of economic forces is equally necessary if anything approaching economic equality and liberty is to be realized" (28).

[5] Sciulli, *Theory of Societal Constitutionalism*, 76.

[6] Neubert, "Pragmatism, Constructivism, and the Theory of Culture," *John Dewey Between Pragmatism and Constructivism*, 177.

[7] Richard J. Bernstein, *Praxis and Action* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971), 225.

[8] Adam B. Ulam, *The Unfinished Revolution*, 15-16.

[9] Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy*, 88.

[10] Dewey, "The Ethics of Democracy," 232.

[11] Honneth, "Democracy as Reflexive Cooperation," 770.

[12] Gilbert, "Political Philosophy," *The Cambridge Companion to Marx*, 172.

[13] *Praxis and Action*, 227.

[14] *Praxis and Action*, 227-228.

[15] Gale, "The Naturalism of John Dewey," *The Cambridge Companion to Dewey*, 55 ff.

[16] Boisvert, *Dewey's Metaphysics*, 106.

[17] See Henry Glassie, *Material Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999); Richard Sennett, *The Craftsman* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008). Sennett's own characterization is one congenial to this wider sense of "practical naturalism": "Pragmatism has sought to join philosophy to concrete practices in the arts and sciences, to political economy, and the religion; its distinctive character is to search for the philosophic issues embedded in everyday life," 14; he finds in "craftsmanship," broadly conceived to include all those practices that require 10,000 hours of experience to master, a path to developing greater critical sensitivity to problems, a venue for ethical problems of the relationship of agent and environment that transcend "relational," agent-patient ethics like utilitarianism or deontology, and a new appreciation for the deeper meaning of developing technique: "At its higher reaches, technique is no longer a mechanical activity; people can feel fully and think deeply what they are doing once they do it well," 20. The source of the "10,000 hour rule" is Malcolm Gladwell's *The Outliers* (New York: Little, Brown, 2008).

[18] Dewey, *Liberalism and Social Control*, 27.

[19] Dewey, *Freedom and Culture, The Later Works of John Dewey, 1925-1953*, vol. 13, 125.

[20] Kurtz, "The Political Thought of Jean Jaurès," 223-24.

[21] See Cheryl Misak, *Truth, Politics, Morality* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

[22] See Decker, "Naturalistic and Aesthetic Individuality in John Dewey's Political Thought in John Dewey's Political Philosophy," PhD Dissertation, St. Louis University, 2004.

[23] Wald, *The New York Intellectuals*, 122.

[24] While these academics had the freedom to debate such topics, not everyone in the early 1930s did, as the case of Rubin Gotestky, a college student and son of a labor organizer proved when he was expelled for reading a book by Trotsky; Wald, *The New York Intellectuals*, 119.

[25] Wald, *The New York Intellectuals*, 116.

[26] See Dewey, *Freedom and Culture*, 122-23; Antonio Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* are an invaluable and well-argued source for the understanding the transition away from a dogmatically "structural" Marxism. Gramsci emphasizes that when Marx's own "authentic testimony" in *The Eighteenth Brumaire, Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Germany*, and *The Civil War in France* is recovered, this sheds light on the fact that "a structural phase [in political or economic history] can be correctly studied and analyzed only after it has gone through its whole process of development, and not during the process itself, except hypothetically and with the explicit proviso that one is dealing with hypotheses"; Gramsci, "Selections from the *Prison Notebooks*," in *An Anthology of Western Marxism*, ed. Roger S. Gottlieb (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 139.

[27] Ryan, *John Dewey and the High Tide of American Liberalism*, 301-02.

[28] Deutscher, *The Prophet Armed*, 157.

[29] Pipes, *Russia Under the Old Regime*, 17.

[30] See David A.J. Macey, "Reflections on Peasant Adaptation in Rural Russia at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century: The Stolypin Agrarian Reforms," *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 31:3&4 (April/July 2004), 400-426.

[31] Pipes, *The Russian Revolution*, 720-21. Incidentally, the situation of the Russian peasantry and the likelihood that in the communes a basis for a possible Russian Communist revolution might occur is found not only in the later Marx (contradicting Bolshevik disdain for the *obshchina*) but is also structurally similar to the Peruvian Marxist José Carlos Mariátegui's views on the revolutionary potential of indigenous Peruvian communism; see Renzo Llorente, "Marxism," *The Blackwell Companion to Latin American Philosophy*, eds. Nuccetelli, Schutte and Bueno (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 171-72.

[32] Knei-Paz, *The Social and Political Thought of Leon Trotsky*, 480.

[33] *Ibid.*

[34] *Ibid.*, 487.

[35] Dewey, "Natural," Contributions to the *Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology*, in *The Middle Works of John Dewey, 1899-1924*, volume 2, 147; italics added.

[36] Dewey, "Beliefs and Existences," *The Middle Works of John Dewey, 1899-1924*, vol. 3, 98.

[37] Dewey, "From Absolutism to Experimentalism," *The Later Works of John Dewey, 1925-1953*. vol. 5, 154.

[38] See Franco Venturi, *Roots of Revolution*, rev. ed. (London: Phoenix Press, 2001), chapter 20.

[39] Engels, "On Social Relations in Russia: Reply to Tkachev," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Tucker, 675.

[40] Knei-Paz, *The Social and Political Thought of Leon Trotsky*, 31.

[41] *Ibid.*, 32.

[42] Lenin, quoted by Trotsky, "Three Concepts of the Russian Revolution," in Howe, ed., *Essential Works of Socialism*, 186-87; the original piece by Lenin is from his *Collected Works*, Russian Edition, Vol. VIII, pp. 62-63.

[43] Trotsky, quoted in Deutscher, *The Prophet Armed*, 74.

[44] Trotsky, "Three Concepts of the Russian Revolution," in Howe, ed., *Essential Works of Socialism*, 199.

[45] Dunn, "Combined and Uneven Development as a Strategic Concept," in Dunn and Radice, *100 Years of Permanent Revolution*, 168.

[46] See, for example, John Dryzek, *Deliberative Global Politics* (London: Polity, 2006); Daniel Bray, *Pragmatic Cosmopolitanism* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011); James Bohman, *Democracy Across Borders*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2010).

[47] Deutscher, *Trotsky: The Prophet Armed*, 422.

[48] Trotsky's unintentionally ironic self-defense was that "Idealists and pacifists always accused the revolution of 'excesses.' But the main point is that 'excesses' flow from the very nature of revolution which in itself is but an 'excess' of history. Whosoever desires may on this basis reject (in little articles) revolution in general. I do not reject it. In this sense I carry full and complete responsibility for the suppression of the Kronstadt

rebellion”; Trotsky, in Knei-Paz, *The Social and Political Thought of Leon Trotsky*, 557 fn. 205.

[49] Deutscher, *Trotsky: The Prophet Armed*, 430.

[50] Crompton, “The Development of the Classical Inheritance,” *Class*, 46.

[51] Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, 193.

[52] *Ibid*, 70.

[53] *Ibid*, 194.

[54] George Raymond Geiger, “Dewey’s Social and Political Philosophy,” in *The Philosophy of John Dewey*, 3rd edition, eds. Lewis Edwin Hahn and Paul Arthur Schilpp (LaSalle, Illinois: Open Court, 1989), 339.

[55] Michael C. Dorf and Charles F. Sabel, “A Constitution of Democratic Experimentalism,” *Columbia Law Review* 98:2 (1998): 313-14.

[56] Dewey, *Freedom and Culture*, 178.

[57] Dalton, *Becoming John Dewey*, 257.

[58] Boisvert, “Updating Dewey: A Reply to Morse,” 576-577.

[59] Hickman, *John Dewey’s Pragmatic Technology*, 61, 63.

[60] Marx, “Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844,” in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Tucker, 101.