

## DEWEY, GLOBALISM, AND EDUCATION: PRAGMATISM'S CHALLENGES AND CHALLENGES TO PRAGMATISM

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper explores connections between global capital and ethics to argue for a critical pragmatist, Deweyan reconstruction of democratic education. Given the wide diversity of educational aims around the world, including aims antithetical to freedom of thought, inclusivity, and intellectual depth, this task is both challenging and necessary. The task is challenging because of the wide spectrum of international contexts, including the tensions among and between nation-states, religious fundamentalism, and economic manipulations. The task is necessary because the consequences of immigration, warring countries and groups, and neoliberalism represent no less than existential threats to human existence.

**Keywords:** pragmatism, globalism, economics, democratic education

### Introduction

John Dewey's relatively famous forays around the globe are well-known to academic pragmatists. His trips to Japan, China, Russia, Turkey, and Mexico are well-documented. (Dewey and Dewey, 1920; Brickman, 1964; Wang, 2007; Cochran, 2010; Waks, 2007; and Popkewitz, 2005) His application of democratic theory to international contexts, while not without controversy, is also widely known by Dewey scholars. Some thinkers have addressed Dewey's cosmopolitanism, his economic concerns regarding capitalism, and the social and ethical threads that connect these important lines of inquiry. (Bray, 2011; Hansen, 2009; Beech, 2020; Kassner, 2021; Pearce, 2020; and Pappas, 2008) I draw on much of this work to update a critical application of Dewey's philosophy to contemporary global issues. Specifically, I explore connections between global capital and ethics to argue for a critical pragmatist, Deweyan reconstruction of democratic education—with a proviso. Contrary to Dewey's meliorism, I offer a sobering skepticism about the task

at hand. Said differently, while I applaud Dewey's vision of global democratic engagement, the realities of the current international climate make Dewey's goals nearly implausible for at least two reasons: 1) the U.S. context in which Dewey based at least some of his optimism; and 2) the continuation of nation-state wars.

Given the wide diversity of educational aims around the world, including aims antithetical to freedom of thought, inclusivity, and intellectual depth, Dewey's task is nevertheless both challenging and necessary. The task is challenging because of the wide spectrum of international contexts, including the tensions among and between nation-states, religious fundamentalism, and economic manipulations. The task is necessary because the consequences of immigration, warring countries and groups, and neoliberalism represent no less than existential threats to human existence. I begin the paper by highlighting Dewey's globalism and the ethical issues he considered. I then explore links between Dewey's ethics and schooling that bridge U.S. and global contexts. I end the paper by highlighting pragmatism's challenges and challenges to pragmatism that Dewey's philosophical commitments face in the 2024 national and international milieu.

### Dewey's Globalism

For this paper, I mean by "Dewey's Globalism" his interest in human nature and culture. (Dewey, 1922; Dewey, 1988a; Dewey, 1988b; Dewey, 1988c; and Dewey, 1989) For whether one is a detractor or admirer of Dewey, it is uncontroversial that he demonstrated a genuine interest in a wide range of questions, topics, issues, causes, contexts, and places. He was also committed to challenging traditions that, on his view, risked atrophying into "the dead wood of the past." Still, I think it an accurate claim that Dewey was not only *not* a comparativist, professionally speaking, but that his views about Russia, China, and Turkey, especially, were somewhat naïve. He even suggested as much three years after his *Impressions of So-*

*viet Russia* was published. In a *New Republic* review he wrote of *Educational Policy in the Soviet Union*, in 1932, he noted that the authors “supplied a needed addition to and correction of accounts (including my own) written a few years earlier.” (Dewey, 1932; Brickman, p. 30) Similar revisions are seen in his forays in China and Turkey, as well as in Japan and Mexico. Nonetheless, globalism is a concept Dewey approaches through what he thinks is a uniquely “American” view: diverse immigrants navigating their differences living more or less amicably together in productive and meaningful ways. As Len Waks (2007) argues, Dewey “had since 1888 been developing an ethical theory in which the ‘moral’ and the ‘democratic’ were coterminous, in which democracy was a synonym for the ethical ideal: the harmonious development of the individuals in society, secured by their mutual awareness and their free choice to cooperate” with one another. (p. 30) Dewey’s ethical theory held that morality requires mutuality. Accordingly, we are ethical agents when we share, cross borders, open ourselves to commentary and consideration/reconsideration. Waks (2007) again:

From this conceptual starting point, Dewey argues that the historical development of the moral community has been its expansion—the emancipation of individuals from parochial constraints that results when their social contacts are broadened. The extension of the size and diversity of the interacting group brings with it a necessary expansion of individual responsibility, because the larger and more diverse group implies more varied and complex demands for explanation and justification of one’s conduct from those to whom one is answerable. (p. 30)

At the risk of inserting my skepticism too early in this paper, it is notable that the U.S. context upon which Dewey based his vision has altered dramatically in the past eight or so years. The U.S. is arguably more divided in 2024 than any time since either the Civil War or the civil rights movement. A nation of immigrants—a key theme Dewey highlights—faces a crisis of immigration. The U.S. is not alone in this situation, of course, as immigration has been a topic of fierce debate in many other countries.

But Dewey’s reliance on mutuality is strained in the current U.S. context. If morality requires mutuality, where do we find ourselves?

Dewey, perhaps ironically, addressed this question in his demonstration of sharing, openness, and border crossings—both figuratively and literally—in his global excursions. As is well known, Dewey visited Japan in 1919, spending months in the country, before, somewhat by happenstance, visiting China during revolutionary events in that country. In *Letters from China and Japan*, Dewey documented everything from gardening and gastronomy to protests and arrests. Regarding Japan, he wrote, rather humorously, that “The gardens here are full of cherry trees in blossom—and the streets are full people too full of saké [sic]. The Japanese take their drunkenness apparently seasonally, as we hadn’t seen drunken people till now.” (Dewey and Dewey, 1920, p. 95). Regarding China, “‘You never can tell’ is the coat of arms of China.” (p. 164) He explained the activism he witnessed in China as follows:

The Chancellor of the University was forced out on the evening of the eighth by the cabinet, practically under threat of assassination; also soldiers (bandits) were brought into the city and the University surrounded, so to save the University rather than himself, he left—nobody knows where. The release of the students was sent out by telegraph, but they refused to allow this to become known. It seems this Chancellor was more the intellectual leader of the liberals than I had realized, and the government had become really afraid of him. He has only been there two years, and before that the students had never demonstrated politically and now they are leaders of the new movement. So of the course the government will put in a reactionary, and the students will leave and all the honest teachers resign. Perhaps the students will go on strike all over China. But you never can tell.” (Dewey and Dewey, 1920, pp. 164-165)

The “new movement” to which Dewey refers is the result of the end of the Qing dynasty, the establishment of the Republic of China, and the protests over the Paris Peace Conference’s finding that Japan could continue to hold Germany’s rights and possessions in Shandong after their defeat in WWI. Strife and struggle were not alien to Dewey’s global forays.

In what I think is an insightful event, Dewey's Chinese guides ("returned students" from the U.S.) took him to see a cotton mill. Wrote Dewey (1920), "They took us to see a Chinese cotton spinning and weaving factory. There is not even the pretense at labor laws here that there are in Japan. Children six years of age are employed...and the wages of the operatives in the spinning department, mainly women, is thirty cents a day." (p. 150) Compare those wages to the average woman's wage as a spinner in 1920 U.S. factories at fifty cents an hour. (U.S. Department of Labor, 1931, p. 4) Dewey was well-aware of economic inconsistencies, if not disparities, in the global context he explored. Indeed, in a footnote he added to the book version of *Impressions of Soviet Russia* (1929; Brickman, 1964) he claimed that he "should not think of denying that the political aspect of the economic revolution in elevating labor, especially the interests of the factory workers, from the bottom of the social scale to the top is an integral factor in the psychological and moral transformation." (Brickman, p. 50n) Dewey's optimism, an optimism I already question, led to his view that nation-states should yield to an international mode of governance. Without an integrated, democratic global community, we would repeat historical struggles and warring factions would be commonplace. According to William Brickman (1964), "What made Dewey's views attractive to European educators at the turn of the twentieth century and subsequently was...the various changes in society due to accelerated industrial and economic development." (p. 8) Among the difficulties that follow from this point are the tensions between politics and economics—and what counts as "development." For Dewey's globalism to function, democracy would be the form of government and socialism would be the economics in play. It is this stipulative qualification that requires education of a particular sort and I now turn primarily to Dewey's *Ethics* to highlight some of the economic and political implications of his globalism for schooling.

### Global, Economic, and Ethical Considerations

In *Ethics*, Dewey provides five chapters with the following titles: "Ethical Problems of the Economic Life," "Collective Bargaining and the Labor Union," "Moral Problems of Business," "Social Control of Business and Industry," and "Toward the Future." (Dewey, 1988a) I begin where Dewey ends and then tease out key elements from these chapters to show what arguments he makes and what might follow from them for contemporary global society and schooling. Dewey concludes that if economic considerations are the driving force in humans' lives, something is tragically wrong. His worry is that "the finer things" of life, like love, joy, contemplation, etc., will be distorted by an unrelenting focus on materialism, commercialism, and economic domination. Here is Dewey's summation: "If the economic dominates life—and if the economic order relies chiefly upon the profit motive as distinguished from the motive of professional excellence, i.e., craftsmanship [sic], and from the functional motive of giving a fair return for what is received—there is danger that a part of life, which should be subordinate or at most coordinate with other interests and values, may become supreme." (1988a, p. 36) Dewey's caution is informed by historical symbols. He begins his analysis of economic life by pointing to architecture and how, in important epochs, buildings symbolized what society valued most. For Athens, it was the temples on the Acropolis. For Rome, it was the forums and temples to government. Medieval cities had cathedrals towering above the marketplace. But the "modern" city, Dewey laments, is filled with corporate basilicas, sprawling manufacturing plants, and banks. "Government is less prominent," he writes, "the churches follow the residences into the suburbs; business reigns." (1988a, 373). Dewey's concern is that nearly "half our citizens neglect to vote; at least as many abstain from the services of the churches; but business and industry admit no absence." (1988a, 373) We do not escape commercialism and consumerism.

Dewey then lays out how we arrived at the current condition of business dominating U.S. society. He highlights the rise of industrialism, manufacturing, and resulting factory work. Importantly, he straddles the progressive benefits of industrialization while also raising serious questions about the consequences of that same industrialization. He notes, for example, that earnings increased from the nineteenth to the twentieth centuries, but not without struggles over horrible working conditions. People may have had more money to spend, but Dewey questions the meaningfulness of lives that endure repetitive motions within environments that increase risks of physical injury and mental monotony. The cotton mill he visited in Japan and comparisons to U.S. factory work comes back to mind. With earnings from such work, what are those wages used for? In some cases, workers' housing was rented from the factory and food had to be purchased from company stores. Wages were cycled back to industry in a commercial loop of corporate-self-interest. Whither the public good?

More will be made of this point in the next section but note how U.S. schools conform to a similar cyclical function: perpetual preparation and training of future workers to compete in a global economy reinforces the idea that U.S. public schools exist primarily for private enterprise. Note, too, how "global economy" refers to capitalist competition. In chapter 18, "Ethical Problems of the Economic Life," Dewey provides a broad outline of the rise of industrialization in the U.S. and some of the consequences that followed. The conditions of work significantly altered such that the economic imperatives of capital redefined priorities and individual power. Importantly, Dewey is not arguing against the industrial revolution, per se, nor arguing that feudal life was egalitarian and bucolic. He is arguing against the effects of the way the industrial revolution was carried out: not only were monopolies funneling enormous wealth to a very small number of industrialists, but the social and collective interaction of communities was fundamentally and re-

ductively changed. Again, it did not change from utopia to dystopia, but, as Dewey notes, "it makes a difference whether [our] relations with [our] fellow workers or employers are of a family or neighborly or friendly character, or whether the relation is purely impersonal and the motive for work is the acquisition of money in some form as wage or salary or profits." (1988a, p. 375)

Here Dewey returns to a vision of human *being* that is not encased in materialist drudgery. His point is that the more materialist our lives become, the less likely we are to enjoy what it means to be more fully human. Note the qualifiers. Dewey is not arguing against work or jobs or making a decent (i.e., beyond subsistence) wage. He is arguing for a global society that is communal, fair, and filled with the kinds of artful serendipity and generative expertise that make us laugh and appreciate existing. What makes this view not utopian is the functional anchoring that comes with democratic socialism. Problems still exist. Chores must still be done. Threats endure.

Addressing these realities is best done, though not perfectly so, by a democratic socialist ethos tethered to a pragmatist vision of the world. In place of Adam Smith's elevation of individuals, Dewey sees individuals interested in more than self-preservation or, worse, self-promotion. Dewey also sees nation-states as "meta-individuals" insofar as they operate as competitive units set against trading partners and blocs. Indeed, Dewey distinguishes between functional and acquisitive societies as follows: functional societies have individuals performing their own parts or roles, where these parts and roles are inseparable from the total society and its growth and security; acquisitive societies have individuals performing their own parts or roles, where these parts and roles are the focus at the expense of a greater good. Functional societies require interpersonal collaboration. Acquisitive societies pit individuals against one another to secure financial superiority in constant competition and comparison to others. Functional societies require altruism. Acquisitive societies valorize selfishness at the same time

as they play on the trope of meritocracy. (1988a, pp. 410-411) How does a functional global society come about, then? The answer, for Dewey, is partly through a public schooling process that bridges inquiry and content not divorced from the social and economic realities students (and teachers) already embody in schools. Beyond cliché, schools as embryonic communities are not separate from the publics in which they reside. Social, political, and economic factors already color what school does and what school means. An unreflective view yields schools continuing to reinforce order, control, and a view of preparation that narrowly ties the purpose of schooling (and the purpose of living) to job skills, training, and employment. Dewey challenges this view by arguing that the problems of classism and income inequality should become part of the curriculum. Students should not be taught that there are “free markets,” when the markets operate in constant mediation of political and regulatory fluctuations to the continued advantage of the rich and at the expense of everyone else. (Oxfam notes that 1% of the wealthiest people have more than 50% of the wealth of the rest of the global population combined. [Oxfam, 2023])

#### **Bridging Structural Differences in Economics and Education: Dewey in 2024?**

Dewey's *Ethics* was first written as a textbook with James Hayden Tufts in 1908. It was updated, also as a textbook, in 1932. Given World War I and the Great Depression in the intervening years, not to mention overlooked-but-significant U.S. court cases like *Adair v. U.S.* and *Coppage v. Kansas*,<sup>1</sup> are there significant structural differences between the economics of Dewey's time and the global economics of the present? The short answer is yes, but there are also some important similarities that

are striking. For instance, in Chapter 21 (“Social Control of Business and Industry”), Dewey writes about the Great Depression, but seems prescient regarding the 2007-8 start of the Great Recession. He writes that a

...complete change in economic conditions is slowly compelling recognition of the fact that men [sic] are likely to be thrown out of work by a general business depression without the least fault or possibility of escape on their part. It is also apparent that, in so far as labor is regarded as a commodity to be bought in the cheapest market and scrapped like a machine when it is no longer at its maximum efficiency, the older protections against poverty and old age—which existed when the employer had a personal interest in his workmen [sic]—no longer exists. A society which claims to be just, to say nothing of being humane, must take account of these changed conditions and make provision, either through the industries themselves, or through government administration, against those contingencies which the present development of industry has brought about. The old maxim was, “Where the tree falls, there let it lie.” The modern conscience believes that a society which makes any pretense to understand what it is about should prevent trees from falling—or when this is not possible should at least prevent the fall from crushing the helpless members of the commonwealth. (1988a, p. 414)

Dewey is arguing against *laissez faire* libertarianism and for an economic system that safeguards basic work and living conditions. While it might be argued, in 2024, that democratic socialism is enjoying a resurgence in some public discourse, it faces the same kind of negative reaction and negative characterizations that existed in Dewey's time. As he noted in the chapter “Toward the Future,” it “is absurd to object to a national plan for mitigating suffering and injustice on the ground that it was first tried in Europe. The argument that social insurance is ‘paternalistic’ or ‘socialistic’ or ‘German’ is convenient hokum.” (1988a, p. 433)

The structural differences between global economics and education are few. Given Frederick Taylor's time-and-motion studies merging manufacturing plants and schools, the rise of David Snedden's social-efficiency advocacy in early twentieth-century U.S. debates about the purposes of schooling, and the increased conceptu-

<sup>1</sup> *Adair v. U.S.* was a Supreme Court case overturning an 1898 law barring employers from firing employees because they joined a union. See <https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/208/161/>; and *Coppage v. Kansas* was a state case arguing the same point. Employees lost in both cases, securing business rights over workers' rights. See <https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/236/1/>.

al substitution of education for training, schools operate far more like factories than communities of learners. (Kliebard, 2004; Wirth, 1979) This point goes beyond bell schedules and the curriculum. The point is that nearly 60 percent of adults in the U.S. believe that schools should focus more on career and technical skills-based classes than on more honors and advanced academic courses. (PublicAgenda.org, 2023) Such preferences indicate the culmination of a century-old effort in the U.S. to see schools as work force training sites, even if the majority of schools are not, strictly speaking, named technical and vocational institutions. Globally, there have long been distinctions between what I will call mainly “academic” instruction and vocational training. (Eichhorst, Rodríguez-Planas, Schmidl, and Zimmermann, 2012; Renold, Bolli, Caves, Bürgi, Egg, Kemper, and Rageth, 2018) As Dewey noted in *Democracy and Education* (1916), however, a “democratic criterion requires us to develop capacity to the point of competency to choose and make its own career [but] this principle is violated when the attempt is made to fit individuals in advance for definite industrial callings, selected not on the basis of trained original capacities, but on that of the wealth or social status of parents.” (p. 119). He continues:

As a matter of fact, industry at the present time undergoes rapid and abrupt changes through the evolution of new inventions. New industries spring up, and old ones are revolutionized. Consequently an attempt to train for too specific a mode of efficiency defeats its own purpose. (p. 119)

At least two historical points are worth considering in order to compare and contrast Dewey’s time to today: The Smith-Hughes Act and globalization after World War II.

Briefly, the Smith-Hughes Act was one of the first times U.S. federal money was spent on state schooling. Constitutionally, there is no national provision for education in the United States. Each U.S. state constitution has a clause regarding education, but not the U.S. Constitution. In 1905, the U.S. state of Massachusetts studied the need for vocational training and a national

discussion followed concerning agriculture, industry, and home economics. The Smith-Hughes Act embodied social determinist theory to identify those unable to do academic work but who were identified as future workers for industry. The debate then, as now, was between technocratic indoctrination or humane development of community. (Wirth, 1974; Hillison, 1995; Hart, 1951; and Hyslop-Margison, 1999) As Emery Hyslop-Margison (1999) notes:

The debate between Snedden and Dewey...reflects many of the arguments...on both sides of the vocational education divide. Snedden considered specific skill training an essential educational element to meet existing labor force demands, enhance national competitiveness, and promote economic progress. Advancing an argumentum ad populum to support his position, he suggested if Americans were forced to choose between social efficiency and democracy as the basis for public education, they would invariably select the former. Not unlike current social efficiency advocates, then, Snedden equated vocational education with providing students the skills, values and attitudes required by industry. From Dewey’s perspective, however, vocational education should be designed to meet student instead of corporate needs and prepare the former for the various challenges of social life rather than for specific occupational roles. (pp. 8-9)

Then, as now, arguments in favor of job preparation saturated media. Fomented by groups like the National Association of Manufacturers, patriotism became synonymous with industrialism. Citizenship narrowed to work-force preparation and jobs became the primary focus of family support. With World War II, a shift to national defense further reinforced the idea that national interests centered around manufacturing. The military-industrial complex became entrenched, and schools were further regarded as sites to produce future workers. The Soviet’s launching of the Sputnik satellite and the resulting National Defense Education Act of 1958 only reinforced this direction.

After World War II, economists associated with the Mont Pèlerin Society (MPS) exploited post-war Europe in a concerted effort to expand classical, monetarist

economic thought. (Mirowski and Plehwe, 2015) Milton Friedman, Friedrich von Hayek, and Ludwig von Mises were leading members of the MPS who argued vehemently against government intervention into “free markets,” championing instead a vision of capitalism that promoted individualism and competition. Where John Maynard Keynes argued for ordoliberal government expenditures, the MPS essentially argued, and Friedman specifically did, that profit is the only purpose of business.<sup>2</sup> Dewey, though not perfectly aligned with Keynes, viewed business with deep suspicion. In writing about the havoc wrought by the cycles of surplus-recession-depression associated with MPS-like capitalism, Dewey (1988a) lamented that “it is doubtful whether there will be any escape from the cycle so long as business and industry are left to the unlimited control of the profit motive.” (p. 383) The consequences, according to Dewey, reinforce a bizarre reality. “Business wants to be left alone by government, but at the same time it virtually admits that it has no plan, except to make as large profits as possible in times of prosperity, and when depression comes to throw the burden of unemployment upon charity” or the very government it eschews. (p. 383) This point is another link to understanding how U.S. schools are arguably exploited by market and business interests.

#### **U.S. Schools as Democratic Public Spheres to Critique Business Ethics?**

U.S. schools find themselves in a double-bind insofar as state governments lure companies to headquarter or relocate to their area by offering significant tax incentives. Amazon is a recent example, but only because it was so large. Many smaller “deals” are constantly made as part of the globalization/MPS-approach to trade. As Tyler Mac Innis and Juan Carlos Ordóñez (2016) note, however, us-

ing the U.S. state of Oregon to illustrate the issues facing all states:

Over the decades, the Oregon corporate income tax has declined dramatically as a source of revenue. This is evident from several perspectives. First, as a share of the state’s economy, corporate tax contributions have shrunk by more than half since the late 1970s. Second, as a share of all income taxes collected in Oregon, corporate income taxes have also contracted. Third, corporate income taxes have eroded to such an extent that the Oregon Lottery now brings in more revenue than the corporate income tax. And fourth, in recent years many profitable corporations have paid nothing or next-to-nothing in income taxes. (p. 2)

The result is that U.S. public schools are structurally underfunded and, because of that underfunding, are then used in “school-business partnerships” where companies call attention to their generosity. I call this false philanthropy. Dewey called it charity. He also found it ethically dubious when he argued (1988a) that “to resort to charity to remedy a situation which ought to be prevented by the economic system is a confession of weakness. For charity places the burden not on those who are able, nor on those who have profited most from previous prosperity, but on those who are willing.” (p. 382) Partnerships can be terminated and “grants” to schools from corporations can be withdrawn. Budgets can be cut, too, of course, but tax revenue is far more reliable than donations.

Schools as charities are certainly not what Dewey had in mind when he argued for embryonic, democratic communities where students and teachers engaged in solving social problems. Using corporate tax subsidies and school funding as projects for inquiry and critique is much more in keeping with Dewey’s view. By studying economics as a contested field, Dewey was rejecting the nineteenth-century effort to view economics as akin to physics. Part of Dewey’s point is that capitalism did not appear out of thin air. Free markets do not naturally occur. They are social vestiges of value: moral commitments that are made and re-made for purposes of power and control. When students understand that economics is not an objective

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<sup>2</sup> There were differences between neoliberals and ordoliberals within MPS, to be sure, but the society is staunchly monetarist and exclusionary of state intervention, at least in theory. See Mirowski and Plehwe, 88-123.

science, they challenge what is otherwise accepted as an “all-knowing” specialization. Belief in antecedent, a priori market ideals masquerading as a physics-like science is arguably part of the reason economists are interviewed and quoted so much, even though they are wrong much of the time. (Fourcade, Ollion, and Algan, 2015)

Learning that economics is debatable, ideological, and value-laden means taking the field down from its constructed “perch” and democratizing the thinking about the function of economics globally. Accordingly, learning communities and schools, too, are made and constructed and are never pure and wholly good. They are like nature, for Dewey—evolving contexts requiring constant checks and revisions for the purpose of justice beyond liberty. (Popp, 2007) For a society to advance economic justice, the law and political institutions will need to re-think the purpose of economic policy and practice. For Dewey, there must also be a rethinking of the purpose of education such that economics is tested and re-thought by students and teachers in schools. In the chapter, “Toward the Future,” Dewey (1988a) stipulates the five central problems to be taken up by schools re-evaluating economics for justice: 1) production and waste; 2) security; 3) worker protections; 4) elevating understanding and taste on the part of consumers; and 5) “problems of a juster [sic] distribution of the enormous gains in economic processes—juster both as measured by service to the community, and as measured by the requirements of a functional society.” (p. 430) Perhaps this point is the one Dewey advocates most in *Ethics*: functional societies utilize ethics in determining a good life. Regarding economics and ethics, I return to the central question of this essay. Does Dewey’s pragmatic view of basic economic justice run counter to how public schooling operates in the U.S.? Yes. It does. It is pragmatism’s challenge as well as a challenge to pragmatism.

Dewey’s pragmatism is one in which schools are laboratories for critique, investigation, and critical inquiry, including—as stipulated in this paper—economics as a field

and as a subject. Current schools teach economics largely from one view, i.e., MPS-like neoliberalism. Accordingly, like other content areas, teaching is essentially telling students “The way the world is.” When the U.S. state of Texas’ state board of education voted to get rid of the term “capitalism” in the state’s economics curriculum, it was so epithets could not be attached (think “capitalist pig”). (Perrillo, 2018) The phrase that replaced the term was “free market economics” and might represent what Nancy MacLean (2017) identifies as “intentional design.” (p. 217) Who would argue against the idea that there are “free markets?” According to this view, the marketplace and competition decide which businesses continue and which fail. Consumer choice determines where money is spent. Except the Covid-19 pandemic ruptured the theory. Delta Airlines, headquartered in my hometown of Atlanta, Georgia, received \$5.4 billion from the federal government to keep it from going bankrupt during the pandemic. I am not arguing that it should not have received the money. I am arguing that the federal capital outlay undermines the neoliberal idea that there is a “free market” and that centralized government has no legitimate (ordoliberal) role to play.

Coordinating efforts between the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), the Charles Koch-funded State Policy Network, the Cato Institute, the Foundation for Economic Education (FEE), and the Independent Institute has meant a barrage of misinformation about climate change, taxes, and the role of public schools in U.S. society. (MacLean, 2017, p. 207ff) If the role and function of public education is to advance a largely one-sided view of job preparation, individualism, competition, and selfishness, then Dewey’s view of economic justice has been overtaken by an ethics of business that sees society as merely a grouping of consumers and global trade as a “winner take all” competition. As he noted (1988a), the “point...is that exclusive reliance upon the profit motive and upon the supreme importance of wealth tends to distort the proper perspective for life as a whole.” (p.

437) Schools subvert this goal of the public good by reifying and promoting individualist competition tied almost exclusively to job training and future employment. To challenge such a reality requires changing what it means to teach and to learn from acceptance to critique. It also requires re-imagining the function of schools to be places where ethics become central to various fields of inquiry. Otherwise, the public good is merely a shibboleth.

And this leads me back to a central tension I noted at the beginning of the paper: endorsing Dewey's global, critically pragmatic democratic goals but realizing neoliberal and nationalistic tendencies inhibit or deny altogether those very goals. Dewey wanted an international order and global executive. He also wanted the "laboratory of democracy," the U.S., to represent a working hypothesis for the world. To be clear, he was not interested in offering the U.S. as perfect "model" or "rubric" to follow. But he was offering the U.S. as a context for pragmatically working out modes of associated living to benefit the globe. If, as I fear, the U.S. in 2024 is riven by a creeping fascism—both far right *and* far left—Dewey's experiment will have to change. My suggestion is that his meliorism should be modified by the harsh realities of division we currently face around the globe. Instead of ending with my pessimism, however, I refer to Eddie Glaude's (2007) caution to me and I will close by giving Dewey the final word.

Glaude suggests that there are plenty of scholars who "hold the view that Dewey's version of pragmatism is marred by a naively optimistic faith in in science of a grievous lack of attention to the operations of power... But how we understand the place of contingency in Dewey's overall philosophical outlook frames how we ought to understand the scope of human agency in his thinking, as well as its tragic dimensions." (p. 18) In *Freedom and Culture* (1989), Dewey seems prescient in warning us that "Authoritarian methods...recommend adoption of a totalitarian regime in order to fight totalitarianism." (p. 133) In opposition, and finally, Dewey offers the following:

Our first defense is to realize that democracy can be served only by the slow day by day adoption and contagious diffusion in every phase of our common life of methods that are identical with the ends to be reached and that recourse to monistic, wholesale, absolutist procedures is a betrayal of human freedom no matter in what guise it presents itself. An American democracy can serve the world only as it demonstrates in the conduct of its own life the efficacy of plural, partial, and experimental methods in securing and maintaining an ever-increasing release of the powers of human nature, in service of a freedom which is cooperative and cooperation which is voluntary. (p. 133)

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