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*John Dewey's "Democracy and Education"  
and its Impact on Philosophy of Education*<sup>\*)</sup>

*Democracy and Education* was first published in 1916. John Dewey called it „An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education”, which means that it is more than just a description of the empirical relations between “democracy” on one hand and “education “ on the other. Dewey wanted us to learn is that *democracy* is the key question of every modern philosophy of education. It is not on the edge but at the heart of the matter.

*Democracy and Education* and its basic ideas are now a hundred years old and that jubilee this year was much acclaimed throughout the world of education. And in fact *Democracy and Education* until today is a central reference for all who want to study the philosophical nexus between general education and the development of democracy.

In his time Dewey was a well sought expert for the implementation of “progressive education” who was engaged as a consultant for educational reforms in China (1919 to 1921), in Turkey (1924) and also in Mexico (1926). At that time he was more demanded abroad than in the United States.

And it is important to know that his practical Know How as an educator is not limited to the time of the University of Chicago’s famous Laboratory School that existed between 1896 and 1904. This primary school was led by Dewey’s wife Alice and as it was a private school someone as to do the fund rising and this was very well done by Dewey himself who at that time was a still not so famous philosopher.

But for what is he famous in education? Let me begin with a thesis:

- *Democracy and Education* has one basic principle:
- General Education for all at a high level serves as the foundation
- for Democracy as a Form of Life.
- Living together in modern society demands public exchange
- and this is not possible without educated citizens.

But this is not a thesis John Dewey invented. The founding fathers of American Democracy, especially Benjamin Franklin and later Thomas Jefferson, had similar ideas that were developed in English and French Enlightenment (Oelkers 2009).

But these ideas had little to do with real education in the young American democracy. The slow development of schools fell far behind the democratic vision of the founding fathers and this caused constantly debates how democracy and education could be brought together. “Educated citizens” seemed to be far off when the country demanded skills for work to build

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up the nation. Dewey worked two years as teacher in Oil City, then a boom town in Pennsylvania, and thus had first-hand experience what was demanded by the industry.

On the other hand: To build up a national school system cannot be done simply by measures of the administration. If you want to know what works in schools and what will work even better you have to do experiments. And in fact there are projects of school reforms in the United States long before Dewey. To name just two,

- the progressive Temple School in Boston led by Amos Bronson Alcott (1834-1841)
- and the reform of the school district of Quincy in Massachusetts (1875-1880), that made Francis Wayland Parker famous.
- Dewey once called Parker the founding father of progressive education.
- But to tell the truth most “fathers” had been mothers.

Anyway, from these experiences Dewey developed the first concept he himself became famous for, namely school as “embryonic society”. The idea seems to be the following: The small world of schools should be equal to the big world of society, both should be democratic. “Embryonic society” very quickly became a watchword for the progressive movement, it is still popular today even though it leaves many questions open.

- How far can the democratic constitution of a school go?
- What are the main criteria?
- Should students elect their teachers and decide upon the curricula?
- And what should be done if schools differ from society?

Dewey coined the term “embryonic society“ in his most successful book *School and Society* which was first published in 1899 and established him as a world-wide leader of progressive education. It was because of this book he was invited to Turkey and *School and Society* was even translated into German when Germany was still a monarchy.

The basic idea has surprisingly little to do with democracy, at least at first sight:

- If you consider students as active learners that are requested to solve problems and for that work together,
- then they will exchange ideas and communicate with each other
- and by this schools will get „the chance to be a miniture community, an embryonic society“ (Dewey 1907, S. 32).

Dewey did not use the metaphor of “embryonic society” in *Democracy and Education*, but he referred to the basic ideas of active learning, social community and thinking as problem solving. The question was how this “new education” can be connected with democracy, and the answer was linked to the concept of “experience” developed within American pragmatism.

But - again at first sight - what Dewey actually said about “democracy” is very astonishing and in need of getting used to it. Dewey’s most famous book did not refer to democracy as a form of government and did not lose a word on American politics.

- *Democracy and Education* is not concerned with power,

- there seemed to be no political parties,
- no struggle for power and no corruption,
- no tricky public debates
- no fights for the majority
- and no change of power.

A world without Donald Trump so to say - For Dewey democracy first and foremost is *a form of life* and this must be the condition for any government that calls itself “democratic”. Government and administration, as far as they are elected, must presuppose a social sphere of free exchange and communication that is neither part of the government nor of the administration, very much in the sense that Jürgen Habermas decades later claimed for the “life world” (Lebenswelt).

Dewey’s most prominent and influential counterpart was Walter Lippmann who in his book *The Phantom Public* (Lippmann 1925) attacked Dewey’s naïve view of public communication free of domination, while in reality mass media created crude stereotypes of communication far away from philosophical reasoning. Lippmann also doubted the effects of democratic education that has no place in schools built for the qualification of the masses. And Lippmann saw Dewey’s shortcomings in politics. In real life politics use partisan forms of communication, need emotional headlines and work for compliance against all political opponents.

To sum up:

- Lippmann missed in Dewey the reality of the business of politics which always has to do with a give and take even if it is not corrupt.
- Political contestation is not about appreciation and understanding at least not when it comes down to run for voters and making decisions.

As a form of government democracy is about the regulation of power. The basic rule is that of majority and the main advantage is that you can deselect the government by vote. The ideals of education must be seen in the light of real politics and the struggle for power.

Dewey had in mind an ideal type of democracy that is guided by the American understanding of neighborhood and community. Learning to be a democrat means learning to live together, exchange and communicate. Schools are to be seen as part of the community and to carry civil responsibility like all other institutions. In today’s literature this social ideal is called “Dewey’s dream” and is considered to point the way ahead in democracy (Benson/Harkavy/Puckett 2007).

And indeed democracy has to do with exchange between different social groups and interests, democracy should consist of fair public debates and in the end all debates should lead to an endurable compromise. But this optimistic must not neglect questions of power and it should also take into account that some interests are inappeasable and that there are problems that cannot be solved. American politics by all means are not to be confused with behavior in neighborhood, the American society is far away from the democratic ideal of equality and this is especially true for the system of education (Alexander/Entwisle/Olson 2014).

On the other hand Dewey was right in that democracy must be a form of life. Theories that only addressed democracy as a form of government, are short-sighted. Democracy must

be part of everyday life and the democratic form of life must be a powerful and satisfying experience in permanence and this even at times when people are discontent with their government.

In this Dewey's idea was fruitful: Democracy is more than just a game of power, and politics depend on democratic beliefs that could not be controlled by politics because they are formed and discussed in everyday life. And there must be, as Dewey told us, a common faith in democracy that even Donald Trump cannot destroy.

To say it in a somewhat different way:

- Dewey's theory of democracy refers to a form of life
- where different groups can live together peacefully,
- share public interests,
- come to wise decisions
- and are able to adjust intelligently to new situations.

Democracy as a form of life is not in need of a leader who decided once for all. On the contrary all leaders are controlled by the people. If a government failed another one can be elected so all power is limited in time. And democracy is not owned by political parties.

So far so good –

- But what has this theory of democracy to do with philosophy of education?
- I must not remind my public that education is one of the key topics in philosophy since its beginnings.
- But there has been little or no space for democracy in the history of educational thought beginning with Plato and the Sophists.
- So what is the role of Dewey's *Democracy and Education*?

To answer this question it is necessary to have a look on how Dewey's theory was formed, to look also on the American discussion on "Democracy and Education" before Dewey and finally to assess how radical Dewey's *Democracy and Education* was meant for philosophy of education.

In 1911, for the second volume of Paul Monroe's *Cyclopedia of Education*, Dewey defines the relationship between democracy and education for the first time. Monroe's *Cyclopedia* was presumably the first pedagogical encyclopaedia to incorporate the concept of "Democracy and Education". Under this heading, Dewey presented not his own theory but rather summarised the American discussion since the middle of the century. According to this democracy and education are linked to one another in two ways: first, in order to perpetuate itself, democracy needs educated citizens; and second, democratic ideas shape education itself, namely the constitution and process of the public school system (Dewey 1985, S. 417/418).

The reason for this can be abstracted from the following quotation:

"Democracy inevitably carries with it increased respect for the individual as individual, greater opportunity for freedom, independence and initiative in conduct and thought, and correspondingly increased demand for fraternal regard and for self-imposed and voluntarily borne responsibilities" (ibid., p. 418).

Dewey wrote numerous contributions for Monroe's *Cyclopedia*, in which he referred at several points to Charles Eliot, who had set central themes of the "new education." This phrase should mark the difference of the American system of education with that of England or Continental Europe, for instance in relation to freedom in education, the stronger individualisation of the teaching and above all the function of education in a democratic society.<sup>i</sup> Eliot is also one of the sources for Dewey's famous formula according to which education is a "continuous reconstruction of experience" (ibid., p. 431).<sup>ii</sup> In this way, education is neither limited nor can it be specified, it is simply and basically the continual process of intelligent adjustment to each new situation in life.

This *shift* of theory had consequences: Individuality is no longer, as in the European tradition of cultivation, the "internal" world of feeling or thinking set against the "external" world of society. Indeed, the dualism of individual and society in general becomes questionable. Society is not a "thing" or a "corpus", but rather a complex interaction between individuals and groups. All social institutions and thus all schools are *solutions* of problems, which can be changed in the light of new problems and new solutions. This social theory of interaction makes it impossible to consider "education" as an enduring effect of internal cultivation. For the pragmatist theory education is an ongoing-process, it refers to social interaction in a democratic society and it cannot use any unquestioned authority in order to come into being.

Demands for a democratic educational reform have been a theme in American public debate since the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In 1850, Edward Mansfield used the term *American Education*. This term was justified with reference to the idea of the republic and not of classical education. American education, according to Mansfield, could be traced back to three principles, namely the American constitution, the natural sciences, and thus modern civilisation as well as the idea of Christendom as it is laid down in the bible (Mansfield 1850, p. 62).

Similar reflections can be found in numerous publications in the decade prior to the American Civil War. Reference is made to an education for the people and not just for the elite (*popular education*: Mayhew 1850), the overcoming of the current educational system and its undemocratic modus operandi (Andrews 1853) or the renewing of education in the light of the poor current material and curricular state of schools (*revival of education*: May 1855).

A public education for all, which is adapted to the goals of a *civil society*, had been proposed in 1854 by the President of the Brown University, Francis Wayland. The huge progress of industry, according to Wayland, the growth and unequal distribution of wealth in society, the increase in mobility and the easing of social intercommunication, all suggest a public form of education, which every person must achieve, because everybody is directly or indirectly affected by all developments in culture and society.

This argument was a central topic of public discourse on the future of education more than sixty years before *Democracy and Education* was published. Francis Wayland argued that it is not the state that is decisive in this process of democratic education, but rather the spirit of the public, which cannot be administrated and must instead take its own shape.

”Thus the public mind is ever wakeful. Every man is continually forming judgements, true or false, but yet judgements. Not only concerning the events of his own town or village, but events that are occurring throughout the Republic and the world” (Wayland 1855, p. 18).

The solution for the central problems of the rapidly developing industrial society is not rigid social conformity of individuals or groups neither distribution made by the state, but rather mobility and education. The civil society requires citizens who can participate in public affairs.

After the civil war in 1869, Charles William Eliot coined the term ”new education”.<sup>iii</sup> This was meant to describe a practical reform of higher education in the United States that was orientated towards the natural sciences, modern languages, and political economy.<sup>iv</sup> As a long-time president of Harvard University, Charles Eliot held a concept of education that should place a central focus on social applicability and efficiency (Eliot 1909). Through this, also the state of pedagogy was criticised:

”The history of education is full of still-born theories; the literature of the subject is largely made up of theorizing; whoever reads it much will turn with infinite relief to the lessons of experience” (Eliot 1869, p. 204).

With such a speculative or ”idealistic” theory, the problem of how a democratic education can be developed could not be tackled. This had already been stated by Mansfield (1850, p. 62); metaphysics does not fit in with modern education unless it becomes a science.

What John Dewey does in *Democracy and Education* is to summarize these discussions of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and give them an adequate philosophical expression. For doing this he has to refute classical theories of education from Plato to Enlightenment and to redefine education with the means of pragmatist philosophy.

- So what is set forth in the seventh chapter of Dewey’s *Democracy and Education* as ”the democratic conception in education”
- presupposes that a philosophical theory of education that fits to this exposition is not simply available,
- but has to be first of all created.

The first and decisive term of Dewey’s own theory is one that has used heavily throughout history of education, namely ”growth” or ”development”. The term plays a central role in the anthropology of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and also in German romanticism and the subsequent pedagogy of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Dewey retains the term ”growth”, but gives it a totally new meaning, which is removed from the organic concept of *growth* on the one hand and from finalistic conceptions of *development* on the other. Fundamental is not the growth of a natural quality in time, but rather the process of continuous adjustment in face of any new problems. This basic view excludes any form of teleology, which, however, forms the core of almost all educational theories. Classical educational theories are ”goal theories,” which can ignore the real process of experience.

Dewey turns this relationship of goals and experience on its head. The use of the term ”growth” or ”development” is wrong in educational contexts if it implies any kind of

teleology "that is a movement toward a fixed goal" (Dewey 1985a, p. 55). After Darwin, a teleology of nature in any form is no longer tenable and should be ruled out, however in the pedagogy of the 19<sup>th</sup> century this teleology was frequently used and stood out of question.

- From Rousseau to Fröbel, in educational theories "nature" is always synonymous with "development",
- whereby it is implied that development is always moving towards a particular goal.
- This goal is reached *with* the movement, it is therefore not part of the process and consequently cannot be corrected by the process.

Fundamental to this is the metaphor of the "way" or the "path", which since Plato's *Politeia* has had a considerable influence on the language and imagination of education (Guski 2007). Education does not only lead from lower states to higher states; it only has one path and one goal at its disposal. Path and goal are linked, but the goal is fixed independently of the path. It is "given", a *telos* in the ancient sense; goals can be achieved or not achieved, but not changed. "Growth is regarded as *having* an end, instead of *being* an end" (Dewey 1985a, p. 55).

- For Dewey, "growth" is an ever limited period, which finds its end in order to begin anew,
- while in the classical theory the development achieves or misses its predefined goal.
- Education refers to an uninterrupted, final and fixed quantity of time
- whereas for Dewey education is build out of sequences of experience that can be interrupted, are never final and can be longer or shorter according to their functions.

But if this is true any teleological philosophy of education has to accept three educational fallacies: First, the instinctive or native powers of the child are faded out of educational theories, they would only disrupt their expectations; second, the basic situation of education seems to remain fixed, so that nothing needs to be undertaken to adapt learning to new situations; and third, education favours means that ensure to accumulate automatic skills, as otherwise continuous growth towards the one goal could hardly be achieved.

"In all cases, the adult environment is accepted as a standard for the child. He is to be brought up *to it*" (ibid.). The goal is conformity with the goal, and then any other behaviour can be only one thing, "mischief or anarchy" (ibd.).

This also explains the position of the teacher: "Since the end of growth is outside of and beyond the process of growing, external agents have to be resorted to induce movement towards it" (ibid., p. 56).

Roussau's *gouverneur* is conceived of in this way, as is Pestalozzi's *Mother Gertrud* and not least Fröbel's *Kindergartener* and thus the teachers of *progressive education*. In all of these models, the teacher should take for granted the nature of the child and support from the outside that which develops itself. However, this demands either the full knowledge of a process that is only just developing, or else an addition to nature, with which growth can be promoted from the outside.

- According to Dewey, "in reality there is nothing to which growth is relative save more growth" (ebd.),
- and following from this, "there is nothing to which education is subordinate save more education" (ebd.).
- The child is therefore not "immature" but rather self-acting.

"Immaturity" emerges as an attribution, in comparison to adults children are lacking certain desired traits. Education then has to compensate a deficit, and this presupposes that teaching is nothing more than filling knowledge into a moral hole (ebd.).

But these expectations, according to Dewey, can only mislead theory. There is nothing to "fill in", children learn as do adults but are never in a status of inferiority.

"Since life means growth, a living creature lives as truly and positively at one stage as at another, with the same intrinsic fullness and the same absolute claims. Hence education means the enterprise of supplying the conditions which insure growth, or adequacy of life, irrespective of age" (ebd.).

Life *is* growth, in the sense that change is constantly experienced and adaptations have to be made. There is no supreme goal that could steer development. Dewey, in other words, negates the theory of maturation and thus the *finality* of education. If education and experience cannot be separated and life is growth, then there can neither be an end to education nor a point of culmination. Earlier guiding metaphors of education such as the "steps" of life or the "culmination" in the highest point of development would therefore be overridden.

In the fifth and sixth chapters of *Democracy and Education* Dewey discusses five concepts of education that are opposed to his own theory and which should be refuted in favour of his own theory. His own theory, says Dewey, "contrasts sharply with other ideas which have influenced practice" (ibid., p.59). What is meant here are concepts of education that played a role in 19<sup>th</sup> century American pedagogy and which were seen as indispensable for the discussion of "education".

They are not always elaborated theories. The criterion of selection is the influencing of practice. Dewey examines forms of reflection that are used in the public and professional understanding of education and with which one or another theory were linked. Dewey's goal is to analyze their suitability for the question of the relationship between democracy and education. The five false concepts are:

- Education as a preparation for life;
- education as unfolding of nature;
- education as training of inner faculties;
- education as formation of the mind (psyche);
- education as recapitulation or retrospection.

Let me begin with the first concept, education as equipping or *preparation* for life. The concern here is with the presumably most effective metaphor in the history of pedagogical thought. The metaphor assumes the value of education for the future of the child and the society, which devalues the present. In accordance with this idea children are not yet full members of society, they are placed in a pedagogical reserve.

- " They are looked upon as candidates; they are placed on the waiting list" (ibid.).
- But children live in a nearly literal sense in the present, the future for which they are being prepared is "a long way off",
- the "equipping" is in effect hardly conceivable and demands a high degree of artificial rewards and punishments,
- without really achieving a real preparation for future life situations.

At its core, this is essentially an argument from Rousseau's *Emile*. Any education, Rousseau said, is barbaric that sacrifices the present of the child to an uncertain future and prepares for something (*préparer*) that never happens as expected (O.C. IV/S. 301). The concern with education is not to gain time, but rather to lose it (ibid., p. S. 323).

However, in *Democracy and Education* the argument is used less radically. Dewey does not claim that education cannot or should not have anything to do with the future, which Rousseau was able to do because he presupposed phases of natural development; for Dewey, growth *is* influencing the future, the error does not lie here, but rather where education stakes *everything* for the preparation of the future. But one can always only influence the present that as Dewey says "merges insensibly" into the future (Dewey 1985a, p. 61). So the gain of education is never certain, and the future to come is never equivalent to the goals of education.

The second false theory of education Dewey calls *Education as Unfolding*. This doctrine is associated with three authors, namely Fröbel, Hegel and Rousseau, who stand for three concepts that in spite of their differences share a common core. This core is described by Dewey as "development as unfolding":

"Development is conceived not as continuous growing, but as the unfolding of latent powers toward a definite goal. The goal is conceived of as completion, perfection. Life at any stage short of attainment to this goal is merely an unfolding toward it" (ibid., p. 61).

"Goals" can also be ideals. They are "absolute" in the sense that the whole of development should steer towards them and only them. In Fröbel's *Education of man* or Hegel's *Philosophy of history*, goals exist latently in development, as "potentials" or "undeveloped dispositions", which are gradually led towards their completion. "What is termed development is the gradual making explicit and outward of what is thus wrapped up" (ibid., p. 62).

Fröbel calls this process the development of the nature to its completion and Hegel the development of history to the absolute spirit. In both cases, the goal is definite, development, according to Dewey, is nothing more than "the unfolding of a ready-made latent principle" (ibid., p. 63). Indeed, most of educational theories of the 19<sup>th</sup> century are laid down in this way.

- The goals are end states, which can be achieved or missed, without being able to change them by development.
- The goals are beyond doubt also because they are secured through metaphysical theories of "nature", of "history", of the "spirit" or of "society".

Some of them are connected like the Hegelian theory of history with Marxian theory of society or romantic theories of nature with the Froebelian spirit of the child. None of them simply referred to life and experience of children and adults within a democratic society.

Empirical theories of education are hardly present in the Continental European pedagogy around 1900 or are attributed to psychology. International conferences before World War I like the Congress of Moral Education 1912 in La Haye showed little signs of the "scientific" method of learning Dewey proposed years before. In these contexts of educational discourse there is no permanent reconstruction of experience and if there are references to science and education they are not linked to democracy but to the "religion of humanity" (Comte rendu 1913, p. 33).

The basic question of the congress was whether education can be laic or should be religious, and in both cases the opponents favoured strong idealistic goals which moral education should lead to. But even psychological theories tend to understand "development" teleologically, which can be shown not least by Piaget and the Geneva *éducation nouvelle*.

Dewey consistently criticises also Rousseau, whom Piaget always referred to. Rousseau, according to Dewey, conceives of the "natural development" of the child as an unfolding of potentials, into which no third party should interfere, because and insofar as society is unnatural (Dewey 1985a, p. 65). But nature is not the "standard" of education, as many reformers at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century assumed. Arguably, that reference to the natural education can be used to criticise the educational practice, but no more; nature does not simply do its work "in" the child. It is not an agent, while the followers of Rousseau understand "nature" as if it gives human development its law and its goal, which education then merely has to obey.

"The constructive use of intelligence in foresight, and contriving, is then discounted; we are just to get out of the way and allow nature to do the work" (ibid., p. 119).

Third, Dewey brings into play *Education as Training of the Faculties*. The concept can be traced back to John Locke. In accordance with this, the human spirit possesses certain powers such as "attention, observation, retention, comparison, abstraction, compounding, etc", which can be influenced in such a way that a "trained habit" emerges. The means for this are exercise and repetition, whereby the levels of difficulty graduate with the success of what has been done. This theory forms the background of the schooling process in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but neither do the presupposed "internal" faculties exist, nor can they be trained like muscles. Only a marginal quality of education depends on training, he who has to learn by heart has no guarantee of having understood that which has been learned (ibid., pp. 69/70). The constant repetition does not make the quality any better.

According to Dewey, the central error of the theory lies in separating activities and capacities of learning from the subject matter. But: "There is no such thing as an ability to see or hear or remember in general; there is only the ability to see or hear or remember *something*" (ibid., p. 70).

18<sup>th</sup> century sensualism implies isolated inner facilities that can be cultivated as such. But the sense organs are always related to learning environments and never solely accessible in themselves.

”Consequently, such powers as observation, recollection, judgment, aesthetic taste, represent *organized results* of the occupation of native active tendencies with certain subject matters” (ibid., p. 71).

Thus, according to Dewey, there is no direct influencing of psychological qualities of children and adults. The criterion for selection of learning subject matters is always ”social” (ibid., p. 72) and not psychological.

This is one of the reasons why also the fourth theory is rejected, namely that of *education as formation*. The best representative of this theory, says Dewey, is German philosopher Johann Friedrich Herbart. Behind the theory of formation stands Herbart’s psychology of perception, which is supposed to represent a new approach to education.<sup>v</sup>

Herbart denies the theory of organic development as well as the theory of inner faculties. His psychology is neither organic nor sensualistic, but rather describes, with mathematical formulae, the inner movement of mass of perceptions. In this way, laws of the mind can be described, which are to be seen as the basis for education. It is thus neither natural growth nor training.

”It is rather the formation of mind by setting up certain associations or connections of content by means of a subject matter presented from without. Education proceeds by instruction taken in a strictly literal sense, a building into the mind from without” (ibid., p. S. 75).

What Herbart called *erziehender Unterricht* or ”educational teaching” is based on the assumption that no perception is lost and every new perception has to be assimilated with the old ones. Old presentations can drop below the threshold of consciousness, but they remain present, an idea which Freud later used for his theory of the unconscious. The inner space of mind is unlimited, education knows no limit and has only one real threshold, that of the assimilation of the new. This too is a powerful idea that was picked up, for instance, by Piaget and used for his theory of development.

For Dewey, the defect of Herbart’s theory of formation lies above all in the isolation of the mind. Herbart’s psychology completely ignores the interaction between organism and environment, or that which Dewey calls intelligent adjustment. In pedagogical terms, Herbart delivers a schoolmaster theory, which strengthens the teachers and not the learning. ”The philosophy is eloquent about the duty of the teacher in instructing pupils; it is almost silent regarding his privilege of learning” (ibid., p. 77).

The theory contains almost everything about education apart from the essence - ”vital energy seeking opportunity for effective exercise” (ibid.). And the idea of formation of the mind is to lead to a conclusive result, to a, as Dewey puts it, ”furniture” of mind (ibid., p. 76), which totally ignores the fact that experience has to constantly rebuild itself. ”The formation is not only a formation *of* native activities, but it takes place *through* them” (ibid., pp. 77/78).

The final theory that Dewey attacks is that of ”parallelism”, which was represented also by Herbart, but above all by his followers later in 19<sup>th</sup> century, an international movement of “scientific education” called the “Herbartians”. From their viewpoint, education is *recapitulation or retrospection*. The foundation for education here is again the idea of development, but now it is understood as repetition or recapitulation.

”The individual develops, but his proper development consists in repeating in orderly stages the past evolution of animal life and human history” (ibid., p. 78).

Herbart’s followers assumed stages of cultural development, and purported that the education of the child would ensue in parallel with these stages. It would thus be a repetition of the past, an idea that in a generalised form has determined higher education up to the dispute between Dewey and Maynard Hutchins in the thirties and which has still not completely disappeared today, as can be shown by discussions of the literature canon according to which the greatest books of the past should be given a central focus in education.

But the pre-eminence of the cultural past is not the main point in Dewey’s criticism.

- Above all, Dewey rejects the idea of heredity,
- in the sense ”that past life has somehow predetermined the main traits of an individual,
- and that they are so fixed that little serious change can be introduced into them” (ibid., p. 80).

This criticism of the biological foundations is transferred to the cultural use of the theory. The present does not depend upon the past; the past can be researched and understood, but it does not determine the future. The theory of cultural epochs of the Herbartians or also the classical education of the German grammar school ”tend to make the past a rival of the present and the present a more or less futile imitation of the past” (ibid., p. 81).

This, however, contradicts above all the theory of time: ”The present is not just something which comes after the past; much less something produced by it. It is what life is in leaving the past behind” (ibid.).

This argument, which can be traced back to Henri Bergson, is also used indirectly against Ernst Haeckel’s ”biogenetic law”. According to this law, which was definitively formulated in 1872, the ontogenesis ”recapitulates” the phylogenesis, an idea that was widespread among American and European intellectuals pre-1900.

For Dewey, Haeckel’s morphological theory is unconvincing due to the very fact that time flows and cannot be ”dammed up”. The past cannot be stocked up, it can only be a stimulation of the imagination of the present. Thus the past is relevant only in an aesthetic sense. Or as Dewey puts it:

”The past is a great resource for the imagination; it adds a new dimension to life, but on condition that it be seen as the past *of* the present, and not as another and disconnected world” (ibid., p. S. 82).

What remains is Dewey’s own theory, which sees education as *reconstruction*. It should overcome the distinction between the internal and the external and thus dissolve the two fundamental dogmas of pedagogy, which see education as an ”unfolding” on the one hand and as ”formation” on the other (Oelkers 1994, 2004).

”In its contrasts with the ideas both of unfolding of latent powers from within, and of formation from without, whether by physical nature or by the cultural products of the past, the ideal of growth results in the conception that education is a constant reorganizing or reconstruction of experience. It has all the time an immediate end, and

so far as the activity is educative, it reaches that end - the direct transformation of the quality of experience" (Dewey 1985a, p. 82).

Only after this critical discussion of rival theories of education Dewey established the relationship between democracy and education. To summarize the result:

- "Education" does not produce something artificial and does not complete anything, but rather adds something.
- It should be taken for granted that children always already possess social experience.
- There is no *tabula rasa* of experience, just as there is no zero point of development.
- Education can, however, "reorganise" experience, i.e. add something to existing meaning or improve abilities to shape subsequent experiences.

In this respect, there was nothing left for Dewey but to establish, in the first hundred pages of *Democracy and Education*, a clear break with what had been claimed since the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the historiography of education as "pedagogical tradition". What Dewey therefore expounded in 1916 was a modernisation of the theory of education by means of pragmatism. "Education" should be demystified, in other words related only to itself without any transcendental safeguards.

Ultimately, the problem was how a theory of the relationship between democracy and education can itself be democratic. In this case, it must manage to get along without the philosophy of the past, therefore without Plato's "soul", "Rousseau's "nature" or Hegel's "history". Authorities of this type can only be adopted or dismissed. "Darwinistic" in Dewey's concept is the idea of development through adjustment, whereby all previous concepts of "development" or "growth" were subject to a clear criticism. They fail to fit in with the two fundamental concepts of democracy, namely "participation" and "flexible readjustment" (ibid., p. 105). The theory of education must follow these two criteria if it no longer wishes to be part of intellectual and political feudalism.

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<sup>i</sup> *Liberty in Education* (Speech before the Nineteenth Century Club of New York 1886); *Undesirable and Desirable Uniformity in Schools* (Address given to the National Educational Association, Saratoga, July 12, 1892); *The Function of Education in Democratic Society* (An Address delivered before the Brooklyn Institute on October 2, 1897) (Eliot 1909a, pp. 123-148; 271-300; 399-418).

<sup>ii</sup> Article "Education" in the first volume of Monroe's *Cyclopedia* (Dewey 1985, pp. 425-434).

<sup>iii</sup> In: *Atlantic Monthly* (February, March 1869).

<sup>iv</sup> Described in detail in: What is a Liberal Education? (*The Century*, June 1884) (Eliot 1909a, pp. 87-122).

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<sup>v</sup> One the first translations that indicates the new approach is Herbart (1877).