

Progressivism in the United States Grows out of Several European Traditions

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Progressivism as education is the concept which indicate a unique point of view, a coherent system of beliefs concerning how change should be instituted and evaluated. More significantly, it should now be made to indicate a unique kind of philosophy and practice in education. Based on this concept, progressive education could predict on reality of change. Above all, one of the characteristics of progressive education (and of progressivism as a point of view), is a willingness to experiment and to accept change. The best clue to such a move lies primarily in the meaning of word "progress". In this paper, the focus will be concentrated on both the concept of change and idea of progress which, grew out of several European traditions, may be the guiding principle of progressive education.

One of the earliest statements of the modern meaning of progress as contrasted with classical conceptions was, perhaps, published by John Dewey in 1910 in the first three chapters of a book under the title of *The Influence of Darwin on Philosophy*. Darwin's theory on the ideas of progress has been accepted and developed by Dewey. It is no doubt that Dewey firmly believed in progress in a desired direction. "Since changes are going on anyway, the great thing is to learn enough about them so that we be able to lay hold of them and turn them in the direction of our desires."¹ Consequently, growth, development, evolution, betterment—these are ever in Dewey's mind and often at his writing. In other words, change and novelty have played a role in Dewey's educational philosophy which have a profound influenced on progressive education.

It can hardly be denied that Dewey was associated in the minds of mid-twentieth-century Americans with the progressive education movement.

1. John Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, enlarged ed. (Boston, The Beacon Press, 1948), P. 116.

The life of John Dewey (1859-1952) spanned critical years of American intellectual, social, and educational history. In each area profound transformation occurred, and in each area he was deeply involved. By discussing these points of view, we must, first of all, to know what assumptions of the European traditions have been accepted or rejected by Dewey. And at the same time, we must know how he built progressivism into American education. Then, we would understand clearly and correctly what the real progressive education is.

Some European Sources of Progressivism

Before focusing attention on the ideas of progress and change, we should, first of all, to clarify the term of progress. The Latin word "*progressus*" means literally an advance in whatever the direction may be.² The word progress is most commonly used to indicate advance toward more or less clearly defined end. Usually it also has a connotation of value in the comparative degree. It implies a melioristic point of view. Things are getting better and better. In this sense, progress implies movement and movement involves change. Furthermore, movement is always change in some direction. As John S. Brubacher points out, that "progress is natural; it implies change; change implies novelty. And novelty lays claims to genuine rather than revelation of antecedently complete reality."³ However, change, to Pragmatist, was not synonymous with progress, but there can be no progress without change. According to Dewey,

"Change becomes significant of new possibilities and ends to be attained; it becomes prophetic of a better future. Change is associated with progress rather than with lapse and fall".⁴

As has been shown, the conception of progress may perhaps be defined through comparison with terms as development, evolution, growth. Like them it involves "the ideas of a series of changes which have a cumulative

2. See Arnold J. Toynbee, *A Study of History* (London, Oxford University Press, 1961), Vol. II, P. 266.

3. John S. Brubacher, *Modern Philosophies of Education*, 3rd ed., (New York, McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1962), P. 312.

4. John Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, P. 116.

desirable direction and inevitability.”⁵ As Dewey succinctly states, “Change means continuous growth, development, liberation and co-operation.”⁶ Thus, we see that the concept of meliorism—the comparative idea “changes for the better”—plays an integral role in the concept of progress. For Dewey, change is welcome because it is the necessary condition for making this world a better place. Applied to education, doubtless it would generally include all tendencies toward improvement of instruction and the social order of which education is a part.

Greek's Concept of Change

Some of the philosophical threads woven into the developed pattern of pragmatism-progressivism can be traced as far as the remaining fragments of their thoughts reveal, generally considered change to be characteristic of reality; indeed, for some reality was change and change was reality. The ancient Greek Sophists interpreted all reality in terms of constant change. Anaximander, for example, saw reality as changing and pluralistic; Xenophanes felt that change was the one true constant in reality; Protagoras argued that nothing is fixed and final; and Heraclitus, the fabled “philosopher of change,” expressed the belief reality is characterized by constant change that nothing is permanent except the principle of change itself. “Everything is in flux and nothing is at rest,” is the motto of his philosophy.⁷ They proclaimed that change is everywhere, everything is process. In other words, change is the basic phenomenon of the universe. “Change is one of the most important fact of life.”⁸ These ideas of the Sophists were much nearer to Dewey's own ideas.⁹

5. Paul Monroe, ed., *A Cyclopedia of Education* (New York, The Macmillan, 1913), Vol. 5, P. 51.
6. John Dewey, *Philosophy of Education* (Iowa, Ames, Littlefield, Adams & Co., 1956), P. 157.
7. K. R. Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966), Vol. 1, P. 12.
8. Brian Holmes, *The Reflective Man: Dewey, in Paul Nash, et al. ed., The Educated Man: Studies in the History of Educational Thought* (New York, John Wiley, 1965), P. 312.
9. In this respect, Dewey was not a follower of Heraclitus, and he knew as well as anyone that the interpretation of life as mere change without purpose or direction led to nothing but blank pessimism and arid skepticism. See William H. Marnell, *Man-Made Morals: four philosophies that shaped*

Except for a few like Heraclitus and Xenophanes, the ancient Greeks considered the changeless to be the truly real, the changing being something less than real. According to Dewey, "Plato took comparatively speaking a pessimistic view of change as mere lapse."¹⁰ Plato would have preferred to deny change altogether. For Plato, change implies only decay and loss. Even in enlightened Grecian times the changes necessitated by war, pestilence and famine still made life on the whole very precarious. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Greek mind tended to idealize the changeless and to hold that the changing was undesirable, even unreal. These views underlined Plato's theories of knowledge, society, and the individual which Dewey rejected it. As Holmes has succinctly stated,

"Plato viewed the just society as the stable static society in which each person finds personal happiness by knowing his place and being content to remain in it. As for individuals, he considered that each is born possessing innate immutable qualities of character and ability, a view that justifies a social class structure based upon the ability of individuals within each group to perform the functions appropriate to it. These tasks would be performed in the light of special knowledge, whether of the statesman or the carpenter, in Plato's ideal society".¹¹

This brief passage has suggested that Plato condemned change and valued the permanent which was the real. According to Dewey, "The conceptions that had reigned in the philosophy of nature and knowledge for two thousand years, the conceptions that had become the familiar furniture of the mind, rested on the assumption of the superiority of the fixed and final; they rested upon treating change and original as signs of defect and unreality."¹²

四 "This belief leads," as Holmes puts it, "inevitably to an absolutism that Dewey abhorred, whether based upon intellectual rationalism or, indeed,

America (New York, Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1966), p. 309.

10. John Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, P. 107.

11. Brian Holmes, *The Reflective Man: Dewey*, P. 306.

12. John Dewey, *The Influence of Darwin on Philosophy*, P. 1.

upon empiricism.”¹³

As for Aristotle, he tried to reconcile both these poles of thought (change and permanent). No less was Dewey criticism of Aristotle whose complacent view of change “as tendency to realization” nevertheless left him as sure as Plato “that the fully realized reality, the divine and the ultimate, is changeless.”¹⁴ Aristotle recognised that change was an empirical fact. Indeed, nothing could be more obvious than biological growth. On the other hand, while Aristotle was willing to make this concession of the reality of change, he was constrained to think of change as occurring within changeless cycles. For Aristotle, change is growth toward a goal fixed in advanced, for example, as the acorn grows into the full grown type of oak. The acorn itself is a potential oak. The full grown oak is actual oak. Change was thus the process by which potentiality becomes actuality. But the species oak remains always the same through the succession of acorn oak acorn oak acorn oak. . . . For Aristotle, then, physical change was real; but he could not conceive of change by change, since he believed all movement must be by design and tending toward some fixed, predetermined and existing within the changeless cycles of reality.¹⁵ In brief, here is a cycle of growth. There is change within the cycle, but the cycle itself never changes. As Dewey puts it,

“Development, evolution, never means, as in modern science, origin of a new forms, a mutation from an old species, but only the monotonous traversing of a previously plotted cycle of change. So potentiality never means, as in modern life, the possibility of novelty, of invention, of radical deviation, but only that principle in virtue of which the acorn becomes the oak.”¹⁶

In this sense, “potentiality”, from Aristotle’s view, “instead of implying

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13. Brain Holmes, op. cit., P. 306; See also John Dewey, *Reconstruction in philosophy*, P. 107.

14. Ibid.

15. William H. Kilpatrick, *Education for a Changing civilization* (New York, The Macmillan, 1926), PP. 41-42; Charles J. Brauner and Hobert W. Burns, *Problems in Education and Philosophy*, P. 63.

16. Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, P. 58.

the emergence of anything novel means merely the facility with which a particular thing repeats the recurrent processes of its kind, and thus becomes a specific case of the eternal forms in and through which all things are constituted.”¹⁷

For Aristotle, true knowledge is possible only of what does not change. Following this idea, “Knowledge is derived from a higher source than is practical activity, and possess a higher and more spiritual worth.”¹⁸ This notion takes us back to the conceptions of experience and of reason formulated by Plato and Aristotle. “Both distinguished between the realms of reason and experience and, in the last analysis, regarded reason as a reliable approach to acquisition of knowledge and experience as not.”¹⁹ With this dichotomy Aristotle associated two others. First, according to Dewey, there was the dichotomy between theory, which “had to do with things which were supreme because divine and eternal”, and practice, which “had to do with things that were merely mundane, things at worst menial and at best earth-bound and transient.”¹⁸ According to tradition, Dewey said, the objects contemplated by theory had to be fundamentally different from the objects upon which the artisan worked his changes: the doer dealt with change, dangerous things whereas the theorist dealt with immutable objects and their unchanging relationship.¹⁹ At this level, we can see applied science support is found out for the downgrading of applied science as compared with pure science. More significantly, the second dichotomy between manual work (those who labored with their hands) and intellectual activity (those who had leisure), between the liberal arts and the useful arts has helped to perpetuate sharp contrasts between what is considered to be liberal education vocational training and inevitably between the culture or educated man and the artisan.²⁰ “This form of philosophic dualism is a further projection of pre—scientific, pre—technological, pre—democratic conditions into present philosophy in a way so obstructive as to demand total obliteration.”²¹ Therefore, Dewey regarded these particular

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17. Ibid.

18. Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, (New York, The Free Press, paperback ed., 1966), P. 262.

19. Brian Holmes, *The Reflective Man: Dewey*, P. 307.

18. Ibid., P. 307; John Dewey, *Philosophy of Education*, P. 162.

19. Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, PP. 262-64.

20. Brian Holmes, op. cit., P. 307; cf. Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, P. 323.

21. Dewey, *Philosophy of Education*, P. 15.

dualisms as among those most damaging to the process of modern education—a point that has been increasingly brought home to educators throughout the world today.²²

From the above short survey, we obviously see that “absolutism, refusal to accept change, and the dichotomy between liberal education and Vocational training were perhaps the aspects of Europeanism most emphatically rejected by Dewey.”²³ In short, change, from classical points of view, was always occurring, but it was not getting anywhere. It was merely fulfilling changeless cycles. The acorn grew to an oak tree which produced more acorns to grow to more oak trees. All change was merely ebb and flow within fixed patterns. The idea of progress, as from Dewey’s view, was simply not present in classical Greek thought.

The Enlightenment’s Theory of Progress

Before the Enlightenment, along about the Renaissance, when Christian theology was becoming closely integrated with ancient Greek philosophy, the idea was advanced that the changing condition of life might become better and better, instead of merely ebbing and flowing. The net contribution of this idea was that change now took on a directional characteristic, and that progress was change in the right direction. But, the Christian view had a definite objective or terminal to the life progress. There was growth, but growth was toward a definite end, namely union with

22. Dewey’s condemnation of dualism was the central feature of his philosophy. On Dewey’s systematic attack on dualism, let us look up the index of his *Democracy and Education* under “Dualisms, educational results,” where he will be directed to “see also Activity and Knowledge; Activity vs. mind; Authority vs. freedom; . . . Body vs. soul; Capital vs. labor; character vs. conduct; Character vs. intelligence; Conservatism vs. Progressives; Culture vs. efficiency; Discipline vs. interest; Doing vs. knowing; . . . Duty vs. interest; Emotion vs. intellect; Ends vs. means; . . . Experience vs. knowledge; Habit vs. knowledge; Humanism vs. naturalism; . . . Individuality vs. institutionalism; Intellect vs. practical studies; Inner vs. outer; Logical vs. psychological method; . . . Matter vs. mind; Method vs. subject matter; Nature vs. nurture; Objective vs. subjective knowledge; particular vs. general; . . . Physical vs. Psychical; Practice vs. theory; Rationalism vs. empiricism or sensationalism; . . . Thinking vs. knowledge.” In this garden of verses we may find not only Dewey’s philosophy of education, but his entire philosophy. See Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, P. 365.

23. Brian Holmes, op. cit., P. 307.

God. In other words, this idea was still placed in the classical forms of changeless patterns. This Greco-Christian concept of change and progress was incorporated into the larger metaphysical pattern of the changeless and the ultimately perfect, so that the Aristotelian prototype was not fundamentally altered. The ultimately "real" of Greek thought had become the Christian supernatural, still fixed, final, and eternal.²⁴ This notion was anathema to Dewey, too.

The spirit of the eighteenth century Enlightenment was drawn from the scientific and intellectual revolution of the seventeenth century. Generally speaking, the age of the Enlightenment may begin with the life of Francis Bacon (1561-1626) who is "the great forerunner of the spirit of modern life."²⁵ Bacon presented a new mode of scientific inquiry emphasizing inductive experimental methods of investigation. The new scientists turned their attention to nature and natural philosophy instead of theology and inquired natural rather than supernatural causes. This attitude gradually enveloped all aspects of life including ethics, politics, and education.

It must be remembered that the principle which "Bacon laid down in his ambitious programme for the reform of science—that experiment is the key for discovering the secrets of nature—was not a new revelation."²⁶ According to J. B. Bury, "He drew up a definite programme for a 'great Renovation' of knowledge."²⁷ That is to say, "The principle that the proper aim of knowledge is the amelioration of human life, to increase men's happiness and mitigate their sufferings was the guiding star of Bacon in all his intellectual labour."²⁸ At this level, "Bacon may be taken as the Prophet of a pragmatic conception of knowledge."²⁹

On the other hand, "the central pillar in the Enlightenment temple of humanity was a theory of progress which itself was based on education".³⁰ The idea of progress was perhaps the single most important contribution of

24. Charles J. Brauner and Robert W. Burns, *Problems in Education and philosophy* (N. J. Prentice-Hall, 1965), P. 65.

25. Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, P. 28.

26. J. B. Bury, *The Idea of Progress; an inquiry into its origin and growth* (London, Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1920), P. 51.

27. *Ibid.*, P. 50.

28. *Ibid.*, P. 52.

29. Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, P. 38.

30. Clarence J. Karier, *Man, Society, and Education; a history of American educational ideas* (Illinois, Scott, Foresman and Company, 1967), PP. 23-24.

the Enlightenment era to western thought. This idea, conceived in the Renaissance, was born in the Enlightenment. As Bury put it, "Bacon clarified and explained the progressive ideas which inspired the scientific thought of the last period of the European Renaissance, from which he cannot be dissociated."³¹

It is important to note that the theory of progress inevitably assumes that "tomorrow will be better than today and that today is considerably better than yesterday."³² This implies the idea that man is potentially good and that this good can be brought about by education. Thus, progress in knowledge would be reflected not only in increasing command over the forces of nature but also in the improvement of human relations. The main condition of moral progress was intellectual progress and the removal of the barriers that stand in its way. The principal agent of improvement in all direction was reason. By rational effort man could achieve a social order based on freedom, equality and justice. Man had the power to make himself.³³ As a consequence, the central point was the idea of progress through the "indefinite perfectibility of man."³⁴

In the doctrine of the perfectibility of man, the goals of quality and equality in the necessary reform in contemporary education. For perfectibility implies the ability of all to learn, and the duty of society to teach. The contemporary task is to make this doctrine real in the lives of all of our children.³⁵ To a considerable extent, Enlightenment thinkers had great hopes in the future progress of humanity because they firmly believed that through the manipulation of such social institutions as the national state and education they could achieve their aspirations.

Based on the optimistic faith in a theory of progress, throughout most American political and social history, from the formation of the Constitution at the end of the eighteenth century to the progressive reform movements at the end of the nineteenth century to the New Deal in the twentieth century, runs an implicit faith in social meliorism.³⁶ In this way the

31. J. B. Bury, *op. cit.*, P. 51.

32. Clarence J. Karier, *op. cit.*, P. 25.

33. Morris Ginsberg, *Essays in Sociology and Social Philosophy* (Penguin Books, 1968), P. 83.

34. John Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, P. 92.

35. Francis Keppel, *The Necessary Revolution in American Education* (New York and London, Harper & Row, Publishers, 1966), P. 11.

36. Clarence J. Karier, *op. cit.*, PP. 26-27.

American faith in the ability of the social institution of education to solve every major social and moral problem of the last century reflects both the optimism and the naiveté of the Enlightenment tradition in American cultural history.³⁷

Of all the American philosophers in the first half of the twentieth century, Dewey came closer than any other to developing a neo-Enlightenment philosophy. As Dewey discussed the historical roots of pragmatism, he said, "If I were asked to give an historical parallel to this movement in American thought I would remind my reader of the French philosophy of Enlightenment."³⁸ Yet it must be noted that Dewey had abandoned one basic tendency of Enlightenment thought, i. e., that particular brand of faith in natural reason with its concomitant devotion to self-evident truths. Politically, Dewey opposed the eighteenth century *laissez-faire* liberals. His most serious disagreement with the *laissez-faire* liberals seems to be on two points. As Holmes puts it,

"First, he found their concept of individualism that isolates the individual from his social context relevant only to the period of history in which it was proposed. Moreover, self-interest was no longer an appropriate regulator of human affairs.... Dewey's second point of disagreement concerned the characteristics of "reason," and on this question Dewey was almost as much opposed to uncritical empiricism as he was to the rationalism of the Greeks and Descartes".³⁹

Furthermore, Dewey pointed out that in nineteenth-century American when the individuals were pioneering a wilderness "the demands of the practical situation called for the initiative, enterprise and vigor of individuals in all immediate work that urgently asked for doing, and their operation furthered the national life."⁴⁰ At the same time, Dewey particularly

37. Ibid., P. 27.

38. John Dewey, *Philosophy and Civilization* (New York, G. P. Putman's Sons, 1931), P. 34.

39. Brian Holmes, *The Reflective Man: Dewey*, P. 309.

40. Dewey, *Individualism Old and New* (New York, Capricorn Books, 1962), PP. 77-78.

approved Bacon's concept of knowledge as power.⁴¹ These two points—individualism and reason—are so central to the whole of Dewey's theory of what constitutes an educated man.

The American Enlightenment, in general, represented a transformation of ideology and value. Basic optimism is a bond between the various philosophies and institutional arrangement of American education. In the optimistic interpretation of the nature of man, the idea of the capacity to learn was linked to the larger idea of progress. Things were going better if man would only do something about it.⁴² The good society was no longer a religiously homogeneous community ruled by God but a secular community ruled by in such a way as to guarantee men their natural rights and freedom.⁴³ In short, Dewey firmly believed that the progress of humanity must go through education. The educational patterns of America that inherited today were established by such optimists as Franklin and Jefferson, Mann and Barnard, Dewey and the Social reformers of the early twentieth century. As good sons of the Enlightenment all these men, in union, would have agreed with Saint-Simon when he said:

“The golden age is not behind us, but in front us. It is the perfection of social order. Our fathers have not seen it; our children will arrive there one day, and it is for us to clear the way for them”.⁴⁴

Darwin' Theory of Evolution

The most influential simple idea has been evolution as first advanced by Charles Darwin in 1859. Dewey has acknowledged its far-reaching importance in many places, and chose as the title of one of his books *The Inflece of Darwin on Philosophy and Other Essays*. Especially during the first decade of the twentieth century he believed that pragmatism was the

41. Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, P. 29.

42. Francis Keppel, *op. cit.*, P. 13.

43. Clarence J. Kasier, *op. cit.*, P. 40.

44. Quated from J. B. Bury, *The Idea of Progress*, P. 282.

Darwinian method transferred over into philosophy.⁴⁵ The feature of the Darwinian thesis which is significant for philosophy Dewey sums up in these terms:

“The significance of the evolutionary method in biological and social history is that every distinct organ, structure, or formation, every grouping of cells of elements, is to be treated as an instrument of adjustment of adaptation to a particular environing situation. Its meaning, its character, its force, is known when, and only when, it is considered as an arrangement for meeting the conditions involved in some specific situation”.⁴⁶

It is important to note that the most thoroughgoing application of the Darwinian hypothesis to epistemology is to be found in the writings of Dewey and the Chicago school of pragmatists. According to W. T. Feldman, it had for them a two-fold significance:

“On the positive side, it afforded a new ‘genetic’ approach to the problem of knowledge which promised to produce a clearer and more fruitful conception of the way in which intelligence operates; and, negatively, it served as a premise in their attempted demonstration that the older lines of attack upon this problem—because of their improper orientation—are destined for failure”.⁴⁷

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45. Pragmatism as presented by Dewey was very different in ambition from the pragmatism of Peirce. Peirce's pragmatism was almost entirely technical and theoretical, a logical pragmatism which was devoted to analyzing the nature of science, but Dewey's grew into a philosophy of life and a social weapon which, in Dewey's mind, would help remake American civilization. See Morton White, *Science and Sentiment in America: philosophical thought from Jonathan Edwards to John Dewey* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1972), P. 267; Clarence J. Karier, *op. cit.*, P. 148.
46. Dewey, *Essays in Experimental Logic* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1916), P. 93.
47. W. T. Feldman, *The Philosophy of John Dewey: a critical analysis*, (Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins Press, 1934), P. 37.

The turning point came when *The Origin of Species* was published in 1859, undermining various ancient certainties and helping decisively to establish a dynamic instead of a static view of life. The scientific data which Darwin presented in that book lent an enormous amount of support to the growing philosophy of progress. Instead of a theory of life that has ups and downs without seeming to reach any destination in particular, or instead of a theory that life is moving inexorably toward its inevitable end, here is the germ of a theory that life is in a constant state of evolution toward ever newer forms of individual and social life. This new view of progress, according to Brubacher, was "a theory of growth which, had no fixed end, but did seem to get better and better if one would but put forth the effort to make it so."⁴⁸ Thus, the Classical and Christian traditions that the idea of changeless forms and fixed cycles was profoundly challenged. Variance, mutations, and "accidents" became as real as, and often more significant than, the regular and the routine. Moreover, life and natural ends which changed with conditions. At this level, Darwin offered the suggestion that possibly these cycles might have a natural origin, that cycles of ordered change grow out of each other. As John S. Brubacher says, "The implication of Darwin's theory of evolution was not only was their change within the cycle, but the cycle itself might change."⁴⁹ That is to say, the acorn which falls to the ground might, under certain unusual circumstances of soil and moisture and other unanticipated factors, become not a white oak, but a red oak. Over a long period slight variations which, when accumulated over a long time, might amount to very fundamental changes in the pattern of reality. On the social side, it implied the possibility of democracy, a social system in which the serf might grow into nobler a social stature than one into which he was born.

Furthermore, closely to the concept of organic evolution is the idea of progress or social evolution. This idea has been declared to be the "most dynamic social theory ever important in the last of mankind on this earth by attainment of knowledge and the subjugation of the material world to the requirement of human welfare."⁵⁰

48. John S. Brubacher, "A Proposal for Judging What Is and What Is not Progressive Education," *School and Society*, vol. 48, no. 1243 (October 22, 1938), P. 512.

49. Ibid., P. 513.

50. Charles A. Beard and Mary R. Beard, *Rise of American Civilization* (New York, The Macmillan, 1927), PP. 443-44.

The significance of Darwin's theory on the idea of progress, as later developed by Dewey, and well described in Brubacher's article, can be summarised as follows:

1. The novel is genuinely new, not merely the revelation of an antecedently complete and perfected reality.
2. The proper ends of life do not exist timelessly, waiting to be discovered by a priesthood, but must be constructed out of the present circumstances by everyone involved.
3. All values and ends have an instrumental quality, and no end is fixed or final.
4. Progress is contingent, having no general formula, and no one can be sure that this dynamic world is tending in any certain or pre-established direction.
5. In short, Progress is experimental, improving the adaptation of human living to changing conditions.⁵¹

It follows this conceptions have suggested that nothing is fixed and unchanging as it was in the Aristotelian conception. As Dewey puts it,

“Change becomes significant of new possibilities and ends to be attained; it becomes prophetic of a better future. Change is associated with progress rather than with lapse and fall”.⁵²

Perhaps the central position of the new order of philosophic thought was its treatment of the concept of change. The new order recognized the reality of change, seeing it as the natural and universal fact of experience. Truth was, therefore, seen to be a function of human adjustment. It represented those happy and successful means which human beings could

51. Lawrence G. Thomas, “The Meaning of ‘Progress’ in Progressive Education,”
op. cit., P. 388.

52. Dewey, *Philosophy in Reconstruction*, P. 116.

bring to their aid in understanding their environment, in adjusting to it, or in mastering it. So truth is relative and subject to change in the light of experimentation and new experience.⁵³ In the same way good, which had been regarded as “eternal in the heavens,” was seen to be a changeable function of human conduct,

Following the above new order, it may be taken to indicate a change in intellectual and ethical method in the large which is a constituent aspect of progressive education. Dewey deserves credit not only for the development of this philosophy and for the polemic which has supported it but for its application to education.⁵⁴

According to this dynamic theory of progress, two things are apparent. “First, progress depends not on the existence of social change. Secondly, ease of social change is a condition of progress. Side by side with the fact the mere substitution of a dynamic or rapidly changing social structure for a static society does not accomplish progress, stands the fact that this substitution furnishes the opportunity for progress.”⁵⁵ This influence is perhaps most clearly seen in the decline of the role of authority. Authoritarianism (and Absolutism) and claims of infallibility are being moderate or set aside, and this is particularly true in those fields of human experience which represent thinking for the sake of better social adjustments.

Moreover, according to Dewey, “with the dawn of the idea of progressive betterment and interest in new uses of impulses, there has grown up some consciousness of the extent to which a future new society of changed purposes and desired may be created by a deliberated humane treatment of the impulses or youth. This is the meaning of education, for a truly human education consists in an intelligent direction of native activities in the light of the possibilities and necessities of the social situation.”⁵⁶

Let us try to sum up briefly, “progress” means something much more exact than the casual, commonplace definition noted at the outset. The new view of progress is a theory of growth which had no fixed end. It commits to the following conception, that:

53. Edward H. Reisner, “What is Progressive Education?”, *Teachers College Record* vol. XXXV, no. 3 (December 1933), P. 198.

54. Ibid., P. 199.

55. Joseph Ratner, ed., *The philosophy of John Dewey* (London, Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1928), P. 426.

56. Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*, PP. 96-97.

1. The universe is continually evolving; truth is always incomplete.
2. Evolution is not the unfoldment of a preconceived design; therefore progress is not successive stages in reaching a fixed goal; it is contingent, not inevitable.
3. There is no general formula for progress; values are instrumental and not final.
4. Progress is experimental. The logic of verification is in part literally truth-making.
5. Democracy is fundamentally pluralistic, experimental, progressive.⁵⁷

The Pragmatic Reconstruction in Philosophy

The term "pragmatism" is popularly associated with the names of John Dewey and of the American philosopher and psychologist, Willian James (1842-1910), but in more recent years it has become evident that the actual term "pragmatism", used in a technical and philosophical sense, was first employed by the logician and applied mathematician, C. S. Peirce (1839-1914). All of its founders were intellectually in the tradition of Western philosophy. Both Peirce and James have made explicit statements about the connection of their philosophic views with those of eminent European thinkers.

In a discussion of *A Definition of Pragmatic and Pragmatism*, Peirce states that he "was led to the pragmatic maxim by reflection upon Kant's Critic of the Pure Reason."⁵⁸ He also remarks that "any philosophical doctrine that should be completely new could hardly fail to prove completely false; but the rivulets at the head of the river of pragmatism are easily traced back to almost any desired antiquity."⁵⁹

James was equally explicit about the connection of the conceptions of pragmatism with certain tendencies in the Western philosophical tradition. For example, he gave his book, *Pragmatism*, the subtitle: "A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking." According to his view, however,

57. John S. Brubacher, op. cit., P. 515.

58. John L. Childs, *American Pragmatism and Education* (New York, Henry Holt and Company, 1956), P. 11.

59. Ibid., PP. 11-12.

pragmatism was not nearly so closely associated with the thought of the German Idealists as it was with that of the empirical school of British philosophy. James reveals his own allegiance in the dedication he wrote for his work on Pragmatism:

“To the memory of John Stuart Mill, from whom I first learned the pragmatic openness of mind and whom my fancy likes to picture as our leader he alive today”.⁶⁰

On the other hand, the full implication of the Darwinian hypotheses for the entire realm of philosophic thought were slow to be realized. According to Edward H. Reisner, “They were suggested by Charles S. Peirce, furthered by William James, and comprehensively developed as the life achievement of John Dewey.”⁶¹

As for Dewey's own form of pragmatism stands midway between Peirce and James. According to Paul Kurtz, “With Peirce, he emphasized the laboratory and experimental verification of ideas, taking science as his model, but with James, he concentrated upon social and moral.”⁶² In a sense, Dewey's definition of pragmatism here is brief and to the point:

“It means only the rule of referring all thinking, all reflective considerations, to consequences for final meaning and test”.⁶³

By following this definition, discussion of Dewey's pragmatism is, ordinary, limited to its problem-solving, instrumentalist aspects; those of thinking, knowing, scientific method, educational reform, and the like. It accepts ordinary human experience as the ultimate source and test all

60. Ibid., P. 12.

61. Edward H. Reisner, “What is Progressive Education?”, *Teachers College Record*, vol. XXXV, no. 3 (December 1933), P. 198.

62. Paul Kurtz, ed. *American Philosophy in the Twentieth Century*, P. 161.

63. Dewey, *Essays in Experimental Logic*, P. 330.

knowledge and value. As John L. Childs succinctly puts it,

"Its emphasis on experience, on experimental activity, on the creative role of intelligence, and on the values and procedures of democracy brought these elements in the life of the American people into fuller consciousness and thereby enhanced their influence in public affairs, including the enterprise of education".⁶²

Again, according to Childs, "The pragmatists found in the method of scientific inquiry was reinforced and extended by the consequences of the growing acceptance of the Darwinian theory of organic evolution".⁶³ "It seems probably that from this source Dewey derived of inductive science referred to earlier."⁶⁴ Dewey himself expressed the general pragmatic view that "doubtless the greatest dissolvent in contemporary thought of old questions; the greatest precipitant of new methods, new intentions, new problems is the one effected by the scientific revolution that found its climax in the "Origin of Species."⁶⁵

The progressive education movement reflected more, indeed, than the application of pragmatism and instrumentalism to education. It reflected the direct impact of the doctrine of evolution itself.⁶⁶ According to the pragmatists, the evolutionary point of view had a three-fold bearing on the classical philosophy. "First, the conception of evolution in which species arise and disappear implies that reality is not a static, closed system, but a dynamic process of change and development....Second, the evolutionary view brings man and all his cultural achievements within a natural process of development....Third, the pragmatists rejected the notion that evolution applied to the body of man, but not to his mind. They therefore recognized that a nondualistic philosophy would have to assume responsibility for

62. John L. Childs, *American Pragmatism and Education*, P. iv.

63. *Ibid.*, P. 18.

64. W. H. Kilpatrick, "Personal Reminiscences of Dewey and My Judgment of His Present Influence," in Reginald C. Archambault, ed., *Dewey on Education* (New York, Random House, 1966), P. 6.

65. Dewey, *The Influence of Darwin on Philosophy*, P. 19.

66. Merle Curti, *The Growth of American Thought*, 2nd ed. (New York and London, Harper & Brothers Publisher, 1943), P. 564.

showing how the significant mental attributes of man developed out of the simpler biological behaviors of other organic forms.....”⁶⁷

Dewey accepted in broad terms the general theory of evolution, of development, change and mutation. In other words, central to Dewey's pragmatism was the development of a biological theory of experience. Therefore, the pragmatists accepted the tentative nature of truth and assumed enough faith in the reasoned intelligence of men to shape their destiny, if not completely, at least significantly.⁶⁸ Thinking was conceived by Dewey as a mode of adapting to the challenges of the environment. Dewey conceived human nature as plastic and learning as Rationally organized experience. Society is basically a set of social habits developed in main attempt to control his environment. Thus, Dewey's good society was a pluralistic society, encompassing a maximum amount of freedom, using intelligence to create a more human society.⁶⁹

Indeed, the evolution of man was not merely a process; by the application of his intelligence to his living in the present, by refining his works, by maturing and perfecting, he could achieve progress for the future. In his *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, Dewey Proclaimed that the time had arrived “for a pragmatism which shall be emphatically idealistic, proclaiming the essential connexion of intelligence with the unachieved future.”⁷⁰ There is an implicit perfectionism about this that even Dewey himself could not deny. Thus any vision of the possibilities of the future by an educational philosopher must, in a sense, be regarded as an aim; and Dewey saw his philosophy as a basis for a progressive form of education.

The net effect of pragmatism was that it contributed to the destruction of traditional conceptions of metaphysics and to reconstruction of philosophy. The central concern of the pragmatists was with insistent problems that had arisen in the Western tradition as a result of the impact of scientific and social developments. According to Childs, “They believe that these problems could be resolved only as basic reconstructions were achieved in the intellectual and moral orientation of modern man. Thus reconstruction of the Western philosophical tradition was the very heart of the work of

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67. John L. Childs, op. cit., PP. 18-19.

68. Clarence J. Karier, op. cit., P. 148.

69. Ibid., PP. 147, 145.

70. Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, P. 177.

the pragmatists.”⁷¹ At this level, Paul Kurtz has succinctly described in the following passage:

“Perice, James and Dewey were not hostile to metaphysics in every sense of the word, but they thought that, like the science, any defensible metaphysics would have to be empirical and tentative in character. Accordingly, all notions of Absolute Being or ultimate certainty such as the idealist espoused were rejected...”⁷²

“Many consider Dewey’s pragmatism more important for its theory of “progressive education” than for its contributions to technical philosophy. His educational theory emphasized learning by doing, and he ceased to regard the child as merely a passive recipient of information. But here Dewey was only applying a basic principle of pragmatism as it developed in America: ideas must broader problems of civilization”.⁷³

Pragmatist philosophy in educational practice has always come in for several criticism. As Ivor Morrish writes, “It is argued that the pragmatist’s rejection of spiritual values and assumptions, of any predetermined or external standards, of any external authority, inevitably leads to the adoption of lowered standards of achievement and of character formation.”⁷⁴ It is suggested that “progress is a question of values and criteria, and that the pragmatist has no such general criteria for total progress, since he has no final values.”⁷⁵ That is to say, pragmatism either denies the existence of all absolute value or makes one value-“the good”-absolute. The chief complaint of pragmatism is, according to Robert R. Rusk, “against the

71. John L. Childs, op. cit., P. 12.

72. Paul Kurtz, ed., *American Philosophy in the Twentieth Century: a source-book from pragmatism to philosophical analysis* (New York, The Macmillan, 1966), PP. 21-22.

73. Ibid., P. 22.

74. Ivor Morrish, *Disciplines of Education* (London, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1967), P. 46.

75. Ibid.

impersonal, mechanistic interpretation of reality resulting from naturalism; the indifference of science to human hope and efforts is intolerable to the pragmatist.”⁷⁶ As a consequence, the pragmatism of Peirce, James, and Dewey were reconstruction of Enlightenment values, taking to account and influenced by both intellectual trends and practical conditions of American life. Particularly, in Dewey’s theory of education means and ends, freedom and responsibility, the child and the curriculum, and the school and society are viewed as fundamentally integrated. In this respect, Dewey’s personal quest for unity destined him to become the great synthesizer of the American experience.⁷⁷ Yet Dewey, who specially applied the pragmatist philosophy to education, was the real father of the progressive education movement.

Finally, we can agree with Dewey when he admits that “the sciences and philosophy of education can and should work together in overcoming the split between knowledge and action, between and practice, which now affects both education and society so seriously and harmfully.”⁷⁸ Moreover, we can agree with that the “dawning movement of rebellion” in Western life and thought which led the pragmatists to undertake their drastic programme of cultural and philosophic reconstruction. “Such a reconstruction of philosophy emphasized not pessimism but guarded optimism; not contemplation of irrational wellsprings but means of intelligent social action.”⁷⁹

The Standpoint of Progressive Education Bases on Dewey

According to Merle Curti, “The influence of evolution, of science in general, and of James’ objective, biological psychology in particular, not only contributed to Dewey’s drifting away from Hegelianism; they were also important factors in his development of a new synthesis.”⁸⁰ These sources have been merged by Dewey and fused into a philosophical system

76. Robert M. Rusk, *Philosophical Bases of Education*, 2nd ed., (London, University of London Press, Ltd., 1956), P. 71.

77. Clarence J. Karier, PP. 146, 147.

78. Dewey, *Philosophy of Education*, P. 168.

79. Clarence J. Karier, *op.cit.*, P. 123.

80. Merle Curti, *The Social Ideas of American Educators* (New Jersey, Littlefield, Adams & Co., 1966), P. 507.

which is commonly termed experimentalism,⁸¹ or the philosophy of change. These sources assume not only that there is a continuous change but also that this change may within limit be purposefully directed to the reconstruction of the social order. More significantly, such change is as Dewey believed, usually described in terms of betterment, social amelioration, social progress.⁸²

As has been stressed before, Dewey who, so much emphasis was place on change, on betterment, has challenged traditional objectives and methods employed to realize them. The Committee that formulated the statement of the philosophy of progressive education in the following passage:

“This view accepts change as an inevitable accompaniment of living. It does not fear it as evidence of decay. It does not submit to the dead weight of the past nor to the active commands of absolutes. It recognizes that social adjustment involves conflict and that conflict, under the steadying allegiance of man’s faith in the human goods that follow upon the collective use of intelligence, is the normal expectancy of the process whereby democracy consciously reconstructs itself”.⁸³

It is an attempt to furnish a sound logical basis for progress-progress in the individual, but still more in the social world. Progressivism is an experimental use of intelligence to liberate and liberalize action. As Karier writes: “Dewey emphasized that through application of science to social

81. Experimentalism and intrumentalism are different phase of Dewey’s philosophy which is generally regarded as an outcome of pragmatism. The immediate source of Dewey’s experimentalism was the philosophy of pragmatism, developed in America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by Peirce and James. Dewey used this in his own account of the way in which a dynamic, problem-solving arganism may be taught to organize its problem-solving skills into flexible habit of rational thought and behaviour. See Robert R. Rusk. *The Philosophical Beses of Education*, P. 82; Malcolm Skilbeck, *John Dewey*, P. 6.

82. Cf. John D. Redden and Francis A. Bruce, *A Catholic Philosophy of Education* (Milwaukee, The Bruce Publishing Company, 1955), P. 515.

83. Harold Albery, ed., “Progressive Education: Its Philosophy and Challenge,” *Progressive Education*, Vol. XVIII, no. 5 (May 1941), PP. 13-14.

inquiry and the use of reflective thought, man could, in large measure, deliberately shape his future and create a better social order.”⁸⁴

If by “progressive education” we mean that body of educational thought that found its intellectual seeds in the facts of evolution produced by Darwin and nourished in the fertile mind of Dewey, then the differentia of progressive education is that it views change and chance as empirical realities and defines progress in education in terms of producing men and societies that are increasingly able to be self-directive. Change and chance are indispensable ingredients in the notion of choice, and it is only through choices made by individuals that anything called progress ensues. At this level, the progressivist’s educational programme for America is founded on no ultimate principle. The only thing to which a progressive educator is Committed is noncommitment itself. Truths change. Values also change. The curriculum will have to be revised from time to time, as the situation warrants. Teaching methods will be tried out, adopted, rejected, revised, remodeled constandy. The flux of life shall find microcosmic expression in the work of the school.⁸⁵

In short, Dewey’s philosophy of education which rejected many of the assumptions and doctrines of the various classical theories of education: the Platonic views of change, mind, reason, knowledge, freedom, and society; Lockian laissez-faire liberalism; medieval religious individualism; and the numerous dualism that underlay many of the traditional conceptions of education. By Dewey’s primary principle of continous change and constant reconstruction and redirection of experience, he present a dynamic model of democratic theory of education. This kind of education which underlies progressivist’s theories of (a) knowledge, (b) the individual, and (c) society.

84. Clarence J. Karier, op. cit., P. 145.

85. See Van Cleve Morris, *Philosophy and The American School* (Boston, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1961), PP. 367-68.