

# School reform and democracy in the public theory of John Dewey: The transformation of liberalism and its ethics

上 野 正 道  
(Masamichi Ueno)

## Introduction

John Dewey (1859-1952) attempted to criticize two social forms, which symbolize traditional U.S. liberalism, i.e., the market principle of laissez faire, and the welfare state of the New Deal. He was trying to develop liberalism through radicalism. He pointed out that liberalism had historically corrupted democracy and the community, and he tackled the construction of new form of school education in quest of democratic revival. He called his position “renascent liberalism.”<sup>1)</sup> He embarked on the act of public communication, and reconstruction of public responsibility based on accomplishments by defining democracy as “a way of living together.”

Characterizing Dewey’s thoughts on “participatory democracy” as “democratic socialism,” Westbrook insists that it “separates the wheat from the chaff in the liberal tradition.” According to him, the wheat of liberalism consists of “three values central to liberalism: liberty, individuality, and the freedom of inquiry, discussion, and expression.” On the other hand, the chaff lies in “the adventitious connection between liberalism and the legitimation of capitalism.”<sup>2)</sup> Paying attention to the fact that Dewey protected the establishment of pension or insurance systems, Ryan regards his thoughts as welfare-state-type “advanced liberalism”.<sup>3)</sup>

Dewey started the reconstruction of school education from the viewpoint of protecting democracy. In *Liberalism and Social Action* (1935), he states, “the first object of a renascent liberalism is education,” after asserting the necessity for liberalism to become radical.<sup>4)</sup> School education was thought to bear a positive role in

the reconstruction of liberalism. However, in *Liberalism and Social Action*, education was not concretely discussed. His educational theories in the 30s were instead developed in numerous short pieces published in various articles.

However, there has still been no comprehensive research on the relation between Dewey's school theory and liberal thought and it is hard to say whether sufficient research has been accumulated. Also, Westbrook and Ryan, barely discussed Dewey's school reforms of the 30s. His school theories for this period are distributed throughout many papers and articles, such as those in *The Social Frontier*, and no systematic theory is developed compared with the early Dewey at the turn of the century.

However, he advocated the importance of public participation and communication by criticizing the market control or the welfare state control of education, and developed innovative school reform with democracy and publicness as underlying principles. The school was regarded as a central agency that fostered social change and created culture, and he investigated educational methods of radical democracy for creating "a way of living together." This paper takes the design of Dewey's school education of the 1930s based on democracy and publicness into consideration.

## Criticism of Traditional Liberalism

### The meaning of liberalism

In *Human Nature and Conduct* (1922), Dewey criticized the metaphysical concept of nature that based ethics on the harmony between human and nature without politics. In terms of moral philosophy, his concept of naturalism was not founded on the standpoint of the classical liberalism exemplified in John Locke's (1632-1704) theory of the natural state, which is deprived of political society, but on the idea that nature is closely related to political, economical, and social activity. For Dewey, Locke's idea of a moral philosophy based on a natural state meant that the state was controlled not by human communicative interactions, but by a transcendental power outside of the social relationship.<sup>5)</sup> In the face of the industrialization, urbanization, and the realization of mass society in the 1920s, it was not appropriate to call on primitive naturalism, but

rather there was a demand to propose a new concept of public theory.

*The Public and Its Problems* (1927) was written from this perspective. Dewey's idea was embodied in concepts of political theories focusing on publicness and democracy. It was his consistent insistence in the 1920s that the assumption of an ultimate harmonious state between humans and nature without political society was not adequate and that Locke's liberal idea of a natural state had to be reconstructed with public theory that was based on human communicative interaction and activity.

Freedom presented itself as an end in itself, though it signified in fact liberation from oppression and tradition. Since it was necessary, upon the intellectual side, to find justification for the movements of revolt, and since established authority was upon the side of institutional life, the natural recourse was appeal to some inalienable sacred authority resident in the protesting individuals. Thus "individualism" was born, a theory which endowed singular persons in isolation from any associations, except those which they deliberately formed for their own ends, with native or natural rights. The revolt against old and limiting associations was converted, intellectually, into the doctrine of independence of any and all associations. Thus the practical movement for the limitation of the powers of government became associated, as in the influential philosophy of John Locke, with the doctrine that the ground and justification of the restriction was prior non-political rights inherent in the very structure of the individual.<sup>6)</sup>

From this citation, we can interpret that Dewey was critical of the liberal theories exemplified in Locke's naturalism, which assumed that a natural state was an individual state and that understood man's desires or actions as a naturalistic point of view. For Dewey, the concept of the natural state that classical liberalism premised meant that the individual was a human isolated from the community and excluded from the political and ethical spaces constructed through human interaction. He called this state the "naked individual", which indicated "sweep[ing] away all associations as foreign to his nature and rights save as they proceeded from his own voluntary choice, and

guaranteed his own private ends.”<sup>7)</sup>

In *The Public and Its Problems*, Dewey was especially critical of the 19th century liberalism that bowed to the classical liberal concept of naturalism. That is to say, 19th century liberalism expanded the concept of nature to the market economy and placed emphasis on the market-oriented concept of nature. Dewey interpreted the 19th century's laissez-faire liberalism as an ideology that functioned according to the metaphysical concept of market nature.

The economic movement was perhaps the more influential because it operated, not in the name of the individual and his inherent rights, but in the name of Nature. Economic “laws,” that of labor springing from natural wants and leading to the creation of wealth, of present abstinence in behalf of future enjoyment leading to creation of capital effective in piling up still more wealth, the free play of competitive exchange, designated the law of supply and demand, were “natural” laws. They were set in opposition to political laws as artificial, man-made affairs. The inherited tradition which remained least questioned was a conception of Nature which made Nature something to conjure with. The older metaphysical conception of Natural Law was, however, changed into an economic conception; laws of nature, implanted in human nature, regulated the production and exchange of goods and services, and in such a way that when they were kept free from artificial, that is political, meddling, they resulted in the maximum possible social prosperity and progress. Popular opinion is little troubled by questions of logical consistency. The economic theory of laissez-faire, based upon belief in beneficent natural laws which brought about harmony of personal profit and social benefit, was readily fused with the doctrine of natural rights.<sup>8)</sup>

Dewey insists that the metaphysical interpretation of nature that expanded the concept of natural law to economic activity was followed by the legitimacy of this laissez-faire liberal ideology. In opposition to the classical liberalism that placed the concept of nature as transcendent from society, laissez-faire liberalism aimed to function

in the real society mediated by the market economy. The idea of natural law was in nature a transcendental concept. However, it had great influence on society due to the fact that the concept of nature is associated with economic activity. In laissez-faire liberalism, the market was assumed to be a space where people interact naturally with each other and construct natural relationships based on human activity. It was assumed that human relationships in the market economy were independent of the political space and thus could achieve the ultimate harmony between humanity and nature. Besides, the notion of the market was also premised to be an individual space, since it was thought to be a space not restricted by social and political intervention and association. In the era of 19th century liberalism, the notion of the market was thought to encompass the natural and individualistic relationships within human activity.

### **Criticism against market oriented liberalism**

Dewey criticized the traditional liberal perspective of public. According to him, the assumption of 19th century liberalism is in itself a fallacy and a deviation of democracy.

It would be a great mistake, however, to regard the idea of the isolated individual possessed of inherent rights "by nature" apart from association, and the idea of economic laws as natural, in comparison with which political laws being artificial are injurious (save when carefully subordinated), as idle and impotent.<sup>9)</sup>

Dewey put an emphasis on the fallacy of the liberal idea of a natural state apart from human interaction and association. He insisted that the result of perpetuating such a fallacy was "a skew, a deflection and distortion, in democratic forms." According to him, putting such individualistic matter in such a broad statement was "in [a] process of complete submergence in fact at the very time in which he was being elevated in theory."<sup>10)</sup> Dewey thought of a deflection in democracy as being provoked by market oriented liberalism. He felt that such an individualistic way of thinking would lead to disintegration of the individual in reality, even though such thinking assumes emancipation of the individual.

Now a question arises. Why was market centered naturalism seen as a deflection and distortion of the democratic state? What needed to be done to conquer this issue? What was Dewey's vision and idea about the notion of the public? For Dewey, the laissez-faire liberal hypothesis, which states that the natural state united with market individualism is apart from political state, is in itself a fallacy. Plus, he feels it is a mistake to assume that people think in rationally economic terms in a market society. In reality, people's decisions follow the customs and institutions constructed through human interaction. And these kinds of customs and institutions premise the existence of communities that are constructed and recognized through common activities. Dewey insisted that there existed a fiction of laissez-faire liberalism as we discuss below.

Incidentally we have trenched upon the other doctrine, the idea that there is something inherently "natural" and amenable to "natural law" in the working of economic forces, in contrast with the man-made artificiality of political institutions. The idea of a natural individual in his isolation possessed of full-fledged wants, of energies to be expended according to his own volition, and of a ready-made faculty of foresight and prudent calculation is as much a fiction in psychology as the doctrine of the individual in possession of antecedent political rights is one in politics. The liberalist school made much of desires, but to them desire was a conscious matter deliberately directed upon a known goal of pleasures. Desire and pleasure were both open and above-board affairs. The mind was seen as if always in the bright sunlight, having no hidden recesses, no unexplorable nooks, nothing underground.<sup>11)</sup>

Dewey's criticism was directed toward the 19th century's liberal assumption that even though mankind is located in the natural state apart from political society, he is thought to possess the power of economic judgment. Although laissez-faire liberalism works on the premise that a man in a natural state is deprived of political and social interaction, he is seen to have economic knowledge and desires. For Dewey, the liberal hypothesis that states that the individual is endowed with the rational power to foresee

and to make calculations about a market society without social conditions is a fiction. He explains this idea using a concrete image. He insists that such a liberal hypothesis is like the moves in a fair chess game. Namely, this kind of economic man is embodied in the chess players who know all the position moves in advance. Dewey concluded that the liberal view of the individual is a fiction based on a clear and transparent individual.

What is not so generally acknowledged is that the underlying and generative conditions of concrete behavior are social as well as organic: much more social than organic as far as the manifestation of differential wants, purposes and methods of operation is concerned. To those who appreciate this fact, it is evident that the desires, aims and standards of satisfaction which the dogma of "natural" economic processes and laws assumes are themselves socially conditioned phenomena. They are reflections into the singular human being of customs and institutions; they are not natural, that is, "native," organic propensities. They mirror a state of civilization. Even more true, if possible, is it that the form in which work is done, industry carried on, is the outcome of accumulated culture, not an original possession of persons in their own structure.<sup>12)</sup>

Thus, the market space is not genuine system organized autonomously by a rational individual. Nor is it a natural space that exists outside of customs and institutions. Dewey thought that a man in the market space follows the social activities and institutions that are associated with human interaction and that are recognized by each person. In other words, these activity and institutions are constructed on the basis of association and community.

## Dewey's Public Theory

### The concept of publicness

The key point in Dewey's public theory is the fact that the notion of the public is constructed on the basis of a democratic community mediated by communicative

interaction. Dewey interpreted the public in terms of human action. In terms of the construction of the public, Dewey rejected the idea of searching for a directive or causative power that controls the public. According to him, we should not look for "state-forming forces" or "the origin of the state," because to explain it by saying that man is a political animal is to travel in a verbal circle. This kind of process is similar to the explanatory method of attributing religion to a religious instinct, the family to marital and parental affection, and language to a natural endowment. He insisted that "such theories merely reduplicate in a so-called causal force the effects to be accounted for." He continues on to say that people have looked in "the wrong place" in that they have sought the "the nature of the state in the field of agencies, in that of doers of deeds, or in some will or purpose back of the deeds." For Dewey, they have tried to explain the state in terms of "authorship."<sup>13)</sup> From this perspective, Dewey tried to reconstruct the concept of the relationship between the public and the private.

We take then our point of departure from the objective fact that human acts have consequences upon others, that some of these consequences are perceived, and that their perception leads to subsequent effort to control action so as to secure some consequences and avoid others. Following this clew, we are led to remark that the consequences are of two kinds, those which affect the persons directly engaged in a transaction, and those which affect others beyond those immediately concerned. In this distinction we find the germ of the distinction between the private and the public. When indirect consequences are recognized and there is effort to regulate them, something having the traits of a state comes into existence. When the consequences of an action are confined, or are thought to be confined, mainly to the persons directly engaged in it, the transaction is a private one.<sup>14)</sup>

Dewey placed an emphasis on his insistence that we must start from "acts which are performed," not from "hypothetical causes for those acts, and consider their consequences." He also insists that we must introduce "intelligence," or "the observation of consequences as consequences, that is, in connection with the acts." He



explains the concept of the public and the private as follows. When A and B communicate with each other, the action is “a trans-action” ; both are involved and concerned and one or both may be helped or harmed. The results of any advantage or injury do not extend beyond A and B; the communication exists between these two and is defined as “private.” However, “if it is found that the consequences of the conversation extend beyond the two directly concerned, that they affect the welfare of many others, the act acquires a public capacity.”<sup>15)</sup> Here, the division of the private and the public is designed according to the consequences of human action. That is, the public is interpreted as an active realm that goes beyond the direct human relationship, while the private is thought of as the realm that is involved with only those people that transact directly.

Concerning the conceptual distinction of the public and the private, Dewey's theory encouraged the reconstruction of traditional liberalism, especially that premised by the 19th century's laissez-faire market centered liberalism. This reconstruction can be seen in the following two points.

First, Dewey's concept of the public avoids setting up the public and the private as fixed and substantial spaces partitioned out by a priori divisions. Traditional liberalism was based on a priori segmentation of the public and the private such as state or the market realms. According to Dewey, civil society advocated by traditional liberalism worked from the hypothesis that ongoing individualism would be consummated through the emancipation of private market spaces from the state defined as the public. Yet, public and private realms are not determined apart from human actions such as the state or market societies, but are pluralistic spaces that are constructed and reconstructed by the communicative and interactive experiences of people's actions.

Second, Dewey interpreted the relationship between public and private as a continuous realm. His theory deconstructs the dualism of the public and private realms by suggesting that the private is involved with the private quality. The distinction between private and public is not equivalent to the distinction between individual and social. “Many private acts are social; their consequences contribute to the welfare of the community or affect its status and prospects.”<sup>16)</sup> According to Dewey, the public

and private do not conflict outside human actions. Both are related and are reciprocal with each other.

### **Publicness based on community**

The idea that publicness is designed on the basis of human action is closely related to the construction of community and associations mediated by “face-to-face communication.” Dewey attempted to reconstruct the market centered social realm into the political and ethical realm of the public. In imagining an “articulate public” through “face-to-face communication,” he criticized the market centered liberalism that encouraged “the eclipse of the public.”<sup>17)</sup> He insisted that “men have always been associated together in living, and association in conjoint behavior has affected their relations to one another as individuals.” For Dewey, it was essential to achieve a community based on “face-to-face associations”. He felt this would transform impersonal and mechanical relationships into active and expressive interactions. Dewey criticized Graham Wallas’s book called *The Great Society* (1914),<sup>18)</sup> saying that the every-day relationships of men are focused on “impersonal concerns, with organisations, not with other individuals.” He continues to say that “the great society” created by steam and electricity may be a society, but it is no community.” The invasion of the community by the “impersonal and mechanical modes of combined human behavior” is an outstanding fact of modern life. Based on this fact, he tried to construct “the great community” through public communication.<sup>19)</sup>

The ties which hold men together in action are numerous, tough and subtle. But they are invisible and intangible. We have the physical tools of communication as never before. The thoughts and aspirations congruous with them are not communicated, and hence are not common. Without such communication the public will remain shadowy and formless, seeking spasmodically for itself, but seizing and holding its shadow rather than its substance. Till the Great Society is converted into a Great Community, the Public will remain in eclipse. Communication can alone create a great community. Our Babel is not one of tongues but of the signs

and symbols without which shared experience is impossible.<sup>20)</sup>

The central theme of Dewey's public theory consists of the reconstruction of "the great society" into "the great community" in which "an organized, articulate public comes into being." "The great community" is thought of as "the highest and most difficult kind of inquiry and a subtle, delicate, vivid and responsive art of communication" that takes possession of "the physical machinery of transmission and circulation and breathe[s] life into it." It will consummate "when free social inquiry is indissolubly wedded to the art of full and moving communication." "The great society" is an industrial and market centered society organized by impersonal and anonymous beings. It is founded on a "naked individualism" that is isolated from common experience and deconstructs both the individual and public spaces. In contrast, "the great community" is constructed on the basis of "face-to-face association."<sup>21)</sup>

Dewey was a strong advocate of and emphasized the significance of association and community. He suggested that the idea of democracy would take on "a veridical and directive meaning" only when it was construed as the "marks and traits of an association which realizes the defining characteristics of a community." "Fraternity, liberty and equality isolated from communal life" lead to "hopeless abstractions," "mushy sentimentalism," or "extravagant and fanatical violence which in the end defeats its own aims."<sup>22)</sup> Yet Dewey distinguishes community from association.

Associated or joint activity is a condition of the creation of a community. But association itself is physical and organic, while communal life is moral, that is emotionally, intellectually, consciously sustained.<sup>23)</sup>

Associated activity needs no explanation; things are made that way. But no amount of aggregated collective action of itself constitutes a community. For beings who observe and think, and whose ideas are absorbed by impulses and become sentiments and interests, "we" is as inevitable as "I." But "we" and "our" exist only when the consequences of combined action are perceived and become an

object of desire and effort, just as “I” and “mine” appear on the scene only when a distinctive share in mutual action is consciously asserted or claimed. Human associations may be ever so organic in origin and firm in operation, but they develop into societies in a human sense only as their consequences, being known, are esteemed and sought for. Even if “society” were as much an organism as some writers have held, it would not on that account be society. Interactions, transactions, occur de facto and the results of interdependence follow. But participation in activities and sharing in results are additive concerns. They demand communication as a prerequisite.<sup>24)</sup>

Publicness is constructed through a democratic community of interactive and face-to-face communication. The notion of the public is not limited to a procedural and neutralized concept of democracy. The public is a space that is involved with political and ethical realms. It changes “the eclipse of the public” into an “articulate public.” Dewey stressed that the relationship between the public and private is not a fixed and existent realm such as the state or market, but is always constructed and reconstructed by democracy and the communicative participation of politics and ethics.

## A Vision of Radical Democracy in the 1930s

### The transformation of liberalism

In the 1930s Dewey also criticized the tradition of liberalism and searched for ways that would shape publicness based on democracy. He claimed:

In short, liberalism must now become radical, meaning by radical perception of the necessity of thorough-going changes in the set-up of institutions and corresponding activity to bring changes to pass.<sup>25)</sup>

According to Dewey, it was not enough to develop just “piecemeal policies” as the situation in the United States in those days where “the gulf” between what “the

actual situation ma[de] possible” and “the actual state itself” was very large. “Reform” that temporarily relieves social evils without social ideas and action that results in comprehensive plans, and “re-formation” that changes the systematic institutionalization of a phenomenon from its essence are fundamentally different. The process by which change was produced was considered to be radical.<sup>26)</sup>

However, what is the actual state to which Dewey refers? And in what sense did it need re-formation? When traditional liberalism first leads to laissez-faire-type market principles, it causes a weakening of democracy and the community. He understood it as a state that has entrapped publicness during crisis. That is, logic that emphasizes the predominance of economic objectives to political is interpreted as the present state of liberalism. Its history can be traced to deployment resulting from Locke to classical economics and welfare-state thought.

Dewey claims that the ideological base that invites the principles of market liberalism was prepared by the initial liberalism of Locke. According to him, Locke’s thoughts on the liberalism of governments was “instituted to protect the rights that belong to individuals prior to political organization of social relations,” and “these rights are those summed up a century later in the American Declaration of Independence: the rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” Dewey takes up the “rights of property” in Locke’s philosophy. It originates “in the fact that an individual has mixed himself, through his labor, with some natural hitherto unappropriated object.” According to Dewey’s interpretation of the initial liberalism, the government was considered to have a duty to protect the “rights of property” as the “natural rights” with which an individual is endowed.<sup>27)</sup>

The whole temper of this philosophy is individualistic in the sense in which individualism is opposed to organized social action. It held to the primacy of the individual over the state not only in time but in moral authority.<sup>28)</sup>

Here, it needs to be pointed out that the view that juxtaposes the individual and society confrontationally was produced by the tradition of liberalism. According to

Dewey, this leads to the idea that two different domains called the spheres of “political society” and the “individual” exist, and it came to be understood as “in the interest of the latter the former must be as contracted as possible.” It was tied to market individualism, which explains its economic predominance to politics.<sup>29)</sup>

Dewey again claimed that not only economic individualism but moral individualism was materialized in initial liberalism. Initial liberalism stands by the position of considering that a natural law is “the counterpart of reason, being disclosed by the natural light with which man is endowed,” and because of this the assumption of moral individualism where an individual can use reason has lurked autonomously. He realized that the problem lay in that reason was considered as “an inherent endowment of the individual,” not as a thing developed and maintained by “men’s moral relations to one another.” An individual will keep away from political and ethical areas by assuming that individual freedom is opposed to social action or cooperative activity.<sup>30)</sup>

This tendency was promoted by the appearance of classical economics in the 19th century. According to Dewey, although classical economists respected the principle of the free economic activity of individuals, “this freedom was identified with absence of governmental action, conceived as an interference with natural liberty,” and led to “the formation of laissez faire liberalism.” He also described that the concept of the “rights of property”, which initial liberalism assumed, brought about the economical formation of laissez faire.<sup>31)</sup>

Dewey mentions Adam Smith (1723-1790) as one of the most typical ideologues who promoted the market principle. Though limitations were attached as Smith did not necessarily insist on the idea of laissez faire unconditionally, Dewey focused on the fact that Smith claimed “the activity of individuals, freed as far as possible from political restriction, is the chief source of social welfare and the ultimate spring of social progress.” According to Dewey, Smith claimed that “there is a natural or native tendency in every individual to each better his own estate through putting forth effort (labor) to satisfy his natural wants.” The history of 19th century liberalism consists of “the guidance of an invisible hand” of Smith that explains “the efforts of individuals for personal advancement and personal gain accrue to the benefit of society, and create a

continuously closer knit interdependence of interests.” Dewey realized that its ultimate purpose was to “subordinate political to economic activity.”<sup>32)</sup>

Dewey was making an issue of the ideology of such market principles in society as representing “the actual state” of liberalism. Since society was seen to be opposed to individuals and was going to remove the social restrictions imposed on them, when “the problems of social organization and integration” were faced, it became “ineffective.”<sup>33)</sup> Dewey thought that without the creation of society and culture based on people’s cooperative actions and achievements, democratic development could not be accomplished. It had its foundation in the design of his publicness of politics and ethics steeped in the tradition of liberalism based on economical market principles.

The Dewey of the 1930s was groping for a revival in liberalism from a democratic viewpoint. However, the society that Dewey advocated did not mean the welfare state of the New Deal that President Franklin D. Roosevelt (1882-1945) promoted in the 30s after the Great Depression. The New Deal started in 1933 and developed a welfare-state policy for finance, agriculture, and industry, as well as an unemployment policy, and social security. Focusing on public works, such as the Tennessee Valley Authority, it promoted business-stimulating measures to establish the National Industrial Recovery Act or the Agricultural Adjustment Act. Dewey criticizes this new kind of liberalism as follows.

But the policy advanced, that of the governmental intervention to redress the imbalances brought about by freedom of business entrepreneurs is not connected with any idea of extending the scope of freedom and expanding its meaning. The action recommended is rather thought of as a restriction of liberty in behalf of greater social security. No reference is made to the regimentation and lack of freedom now suffered by the great mass of workers. Nothing is said about the larger phases of liberty that have to do with freedom of the many to participate in the culture that is now possessed by society but not distributed. But the former point is not outside; it belongs in any discussion of freedom that is limited to the economic phase. Moreover, it appears when a socially planned economy is

adversely considered. But as far as workers are concerned the only things taken up is security, and that not as a prerequisite of freedom, as a necessary condition of social stability. If this is as far as liberalism can go, I fear it is bankrupt and doomed.<sup>34)</sup>

A New-Deal-type welfare state was not considered to extend the opportunity for citizens to participate in creating culture or forming society. Dewey's concept of publicness not only denied the principles of a laissez-faire market, but kept its distance from the welfare-state liberalism of the New Deal.

#### A vision of radical democracy

Dewey wrote the paper "Democracy Is Radical" (1937) in the journal *Common Sense*. He claims here that democracy is "radical because it requires great change in existing social institutions, economic, legal and cultural."<sup>35)</sup> He is expressing democracy as "cooperative democracy" and "creative democracy." He especially conceived of democracy as "a way of living together" from the viewpoints of participation by the community and communication. In *Education and Social Change* (1937), he stated:

Democracy also means voluntary choice, based on an intelligence that is the outcome of free association and communication with others. It means a way of living together in which mutual and free consultation rule instead of force, and in which cooperation instead of brutal competition is the law of life; a social order in which all the forces that makes for friendship, beauty, and knowledge are cherished in order that each individual may become what he, and he alone, is capable of becoming.<sup>36)</sup>

Democracy as termed by Dewey meant creating "a way of living together" on the basis of "free association with others," "communication," and "mutual consultation." He stated that democracy is far larger than "a special political form" or "a method of conducting government, of making laws and carrying on governmental administration



by means of popular suffrage and elected officers.” He also stated that “the political and governmental phase of democracy” is “a means” to achieve the “ends that lie in the wide domain of human relationships and the development of human personality” and “the best means” to realize “a way of life, social and individual.”<sup>37)</sup> He claimed.

The key-note of democracy as a way of life may be expressed, it seems to me, as the necessity for the participation of every mature human being in formation of the values that regulate the living of men together - which is necessary from the standpoint of both the general social welfare and the full development of human beings as individuals.<sup>38)</sup>

In the sense that democracy was limited to being “political in nature,” Dewey indicated that democracy fell where “it had not become part of the bone and blood of the people.”<sup>39)</sup> “Democracy as a way of life” cleared the ground for interpreting the idea of publicness within the dimensions of politics and ethics, which constitute values through man’s acts and activities.

Dewey tried to overcome traditional liberalism by regarding democracy as “a way of living together.” It received the tradition of liberalism that was developed based on individualism centering on the freedom of individual economic activity, investigations into industrial efficiency, and security about the neutrality of political and institutional procedures. “Democracy as a way of life” was used to search for the creation of culture and society within political and ethical dimensions. He asserted the necessity for building democracy based on “the method of mutual consultation and voluntary agreement,” after saying, “the very fact of exclusion from participation is a subtle form of suppression.”<sup>40)</sup> Communication by the public and the idea of participation were set forth to prevent exclusion from participation. This meant that people participated in the community and constructed a cooperative way of life by social actions and activities. Thus, through public participation and communication, democracy would promote “a way of life, social and individual” in connection with the creation of society and culture, which protected the politics and ethics of public space.

## Education for Democracy

Dewey claimed that the first object of liberalism as radicalism lay in “education.” However, he was not discussing this concrete content within the typical context of the 30s. Rather, he was searching for positive strategies that would connect publicness to schools in his short article in *The Social Frontier*. He promoted the school as a social and cultural agency, and tackled the development of school reform based on the creation of radical democracy.

### School as democratic agency

Dewey was engaged in radical school reform from the viewpoint of protecting democracy. His radicalism consisted of criticizing the economic market principle and the extension of the bureaucratic control of the state, building a network for solidarity and cooperation through participation and communication, and searching for the possibility of the school to be a central agency that would promote social change and create culture. He pointed out the role of the educational system in *Individualism, Old and New* (1930) as follows.

It (our educational system) is also the agency of important welding and fusing processes. These are conditions of creation of a mind that will constitute a distinctive type of culture. But they are conditions only. If our public-school system merely turns out efficient industrial fodder and citizenship fodder in a state controlled by pecuniary industry, as other schools in other nations have turned out efficient cannon fodder, it is not helping to solve the problem of building up a distinctive American culture; it is only aggravating the problem.<sup>41)</sup>

Dewey meant building the school based on publicness, which supports social change and cultural creation centering on participation and communication by the public. According to him, schools are thought to be “the formal agencies for producing

those mental attitudes; those modes of feeling and thinking, which are the essence of a distinctive culture.” However, schools are not the ultimate and only determinants of such cultural creation. Society and culture are created when education is concerned with social systems and vocations, and society, art, and lifestyle are acting on one another. He claimed that not only the quantity of culture but its quality was important. Its importance lay not only in increasing the number of those participating in the creation of arts or sciences, but in assessing quality as a theme accompanied by political and economical considerations. The creation of society and culture are promoted when a school cooperates with other political, economical, and social agencies, rather than being governed by the class system of an economical market principle or the state.<sup>42)</sup>

Dewey stated:

If, then, I select education for special notice, it is because education - in the broad sense of formation of fundamental attitudes of imagination, desire and thinking - is strictly correlative with culture in its inclusive social sense. It is because the educative influence of economic and political institutions is, in the last analysis, even more important than their immediate economic consequences.<sup>43)</sup>

Dewey is emphasizing the concept of “culture” here. In *Freedom and Culture* (1939), the theme of “culture” is discussed more positively. Turning around the idea by Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826), the 3rd President of the U.S.A., that “freedom of culture” is “the final result of political freedom,” Dewey developed the thought that “political freedom” cannot be maintained without “freedom of culture. “The relations which exist between persons, outside of political institutions, relations of industry, of communication, of science, art and religion” affect “daily associations” and “the attitudes and habits expressed in government and rules of law.” It has been said that “the political and legal react to shape the other things” and “political institutions are an effect, not a cause.”<sup>44)</sup> Dewey went on to further define culture.

For this complex of conditions which taxes the terms upon which human beings

associate and live together is summed up in the word culture. The problem is to know what kind of culture is so free in itself that it conceives and begets political freedom as its accompaniment and consequence. What about the state of science and knowledge; of the arts, fine and technological; of friendships and family life; of business and finance; of the attitudes and dispositions created in the give and take of ordinary day by day associations? No matter what is the native make-up of human nature, its working activities, those which respond to institutions and rules and which finally shape the pattern of the latter, are created by the whole body of occupations, interests, skills, beliefs that constitute a given culture.<sup>45)</sup>

According to Dewey, the state of “culture” meant “the system of general ideas” used to justify or blame the fundamental conditions underlying law, politics, industry, commerce, science, technology, expressions, transmission of ideas, morality, and the sense of values that people think of as being important, their evaluation, and “state of interaction.” He claimed that the things that “are concerned with the problem” are more important than how “the problems of freedom” should be solved, and we need to recognize the relation the “context of the elements that constitute culture” has to the interaction with “human nature” as a problem. He groped for further “cooperative individualities” creating “a way of living together.”<sup>46)</sup> By this, he protected the reforms that schools introduced and promoted social change and the creation of culture.

### **Educational freedom**

Dewey radically reflected upon the concept of “freedom”, which constitutes the central value of liberalism within the context of school education. This is because “educational freedom” and “academic freedom” were what he considered should be respected most.

Representing a liberal group, Dewey wrote the paper “How Much Freedom in New Schools?” (1930) in *The New Republic*. There, the meaning and limits of “freedom”, which progressive education are concerned about are discussed. Though it accepts that various diversities in progressive education can also be seen, there are common

directions to escape the restraints of fixed uniform training where traditional education is promoted. He “express[ed] discontent with traditional education,” and criticized “formalism and mass regimentation.” According to him, the progressive education movement was a “manifestation of a desire for an education at once freer and richer” as a reaction to traditional education. Its importance lay in “the belief in freedom, in esthetic enjoyment and artistic expression, in opportunity for individual development, and in learning through activity rather than by passive absorption.”<sup>47)</sup> Dewey went further:

Upon the whole, progressive schools have been most successful in furthering creativeness in the arts - in music, drawing and picture making, dramatics and literary composition, including poetry. This achievement is well worth while; it ought to assist in producing a generation esthetically more sensitive and alive than the older one. But it is not enough. Taken by itself it will do something to further the private appreciations of, say, the upper section of a middle class. But it will not serve to meet even the esthetic needs and defaultings of contemporary industrial society in its prevailing external expressions. Again, while much has been achieved in teaching science as an addition to private resources in intellectual enjoyment, I do not find that as much has been done in bringing out the relation of science to industrial society, and its potentialities for a planned control of future developments.<sup>48)</sup>

Dewey claims that progressive schools had remarkable success in respecting freedom of expression in the creative arts. However, since they were ambivalent about industrial and political concerns, or actual social preparation, they lacked freedom of expression through their connection with social and political movements. Dewey tried to secure educational freedom not from the perspective of individualistic appreciation and taste about artistic expression or esthetic activity, but within the social and cultural context.<sup>49)</sup>

Freedom in social and cultural activities concerned Dewey who wanted to keep

creative freedom close contact with artistic freedom of expression. Dewey wrote a paper on "The Social Significance of Academic Freedom" (1936). He claimed that education was not performed in a void, but was a social and political matter. He wrote:

Freedom of education is the thing at issue - I was about to say at stake. And since education is not a function that goes on in the void; but is carried on by human beings, the freedom of education means, in the concrete, the freedom of students and teachers: the freedom of the school as an agent of education.<sup>50)</sup>

Dewey indicated that it was important to include not only a teacher's freedom but a student's freedom in educational freedom, and he primarily suggested that a teacher's freedom and a student's freedom cannot be separated. A teacher's freedom is a necessary condition for a student's freedom to learn. Freedom of education is "a social matter," as is "the distribution of effective power, that, finally, the struggle for liberty is important because of its consequences in effecting more just, equable, and human relations of men, women, and children to one another." Educational freedom is therefore indispensable in building a democratic society.

Dewey says that it is "a crime against democracy" to deny freedom in education, since "freedom of mind and freedom of expression" are "the root of all freedom." Academic freedom is essentially "a social issue" and is closely related to "what the future citizenship of the country is going to do in shaping our political and economic destiny" It is at the bottom of democracy with respect to social, political, and economical issues. Dewey indicated that the social significance of academic freedom lies in the fact that there are no freedoms that enable the influence of everything acting on society, and the freedom of teachers and students to be investigated. Social change, which is advancing with the educational process, is founded on "intelligent and orderly methods of directing to a more just, equitable, and humane end." He attempted to introduce "training for good citizenship" through the acquisition of educational freedom.<sup>51)</sup>

Dewey declared the meaning of educational freedom in "Toward a National System

of Education” (1935).

The bearing of these remarks upon my theme is that they point to the need of concentration and clarification of the methods of free mutual discussion and communication among teachers - methods that are responsible for whatever advances have been made in public education in the past.<sup>52)</sup>

Here, Dewey regards “educational freedom” as an important factor of democratic society. He offers the viewpoint of freedom existing in the relation between teachers and children, which is a social issue, rather than it existing in an individual void. The foundation of public education based on communicative interaction is especially important. The publicness of schools does not mean a formal procedure based on political institutions as his idea of democracy symbolically shows, but it is constructed through “a way of living together” that the action and activity of social communication constitute. It is conceived of publicness with political and ethical dimensions. School is not to be neutralized in void space, but needs solidarity with other social agencies and networks. He sought the development of the school system as an agency of democracy and publicness that supports social change and the creation of culture.

### **Democracy and education**

In “Democracy and Education in the World of Today” (1938), Dewey is arguing that democracy and education involve a reciprocal concession.

It is obvious that the relation between democracy and education is a reciprocal one, a mutual one, and vitally so. Democracy is itself an educational principle, an educational measure and policy.<sup>53)</sup>

Dewey pays attention to the reciprocal relation between democracy and schools. In “The Challenge of Democracy to Education” (1935), he denied a fixed concept of democracy. According to him, democracy is “continually explored afresh” and

“constantly discovered, and rediscovered, remade and reorganized.” Therefore, “democracy as a form of life” cannot “stand still,” and in this it fosters “the challenge that democracy offers to education.”<sup>54)</sup>

Only when schools understand the motion and direction of social influence, and the fulfillment of social needs and demands, can they accept democratic challenges. It is important to recognize the word “understanding” here. He replaces the word “understanding” with “knowledge.” In contrast to the word “knowledge”, which is often associated with information, “understanding” is connected with action. “Information” is separate from acts and is connected with accidental acts.

Dewey says that “the isolation of the school” has separated “knowledge” from the “act.” Though social life is “a composite of activities that are going on and that are producing consequences,” schools have been estranged from the act that produces such social life. The act of communication creates schools as “a way of living together,” which involves various cooperative public activities. In this sense, education and democracy are reciprocal.<sup>55)</sup> Dewey claims:

One factor inherent in the situation is that schools do follow and reflect the social order that exists. I do not make this statement as a grudging admission, nor yet in order to argue that they should not do so. I make it rather as a statement of a conditioning factor which supports the conclusion that the schools thereby do take part in the determination of a future social order; and that, accordingly, the problem is not whether the schools should participate in the production of a future society (since they do so anyway) but whether they should do it blindly and irresponsibly or with the maximum possible of courageous intelligence and responsibility.<sup>56)</sup>

Schools should not contribute to maintaining the existing social order as it is, instead making it reflect and educate. That schools follow a social system blindly meant a democratic decline. Democracy is achieved through education, and as long as schools participate in the community, they are closely connected to people’s “way of living



together.” Dewey searched for the possibility of the school being an agency of democracy to promote social change and create culture. Democratic education does not blindly follow in the footsteps of the existing social order in a state or a market, neither is it limited to formal procedures in a system. Instead it develops solidarity to construct networks based on participation and communication by the public. The publicness of the school was understood within the context of political and ethical dimensions.

## Conclusion

Dewey tried to develop liberalism through radicalism. His radicalism consisted of criticizing both laissez-faire market-principle liberalism and New-Deal welfare-state liberalism, and searching for the construction of the publicness of democracy based on participation and communication by the community. According to him, both the principles of competition in the marketplace and bureaucratic control by the welfare state meant the destruction of cooperative associations and the community. On the other hand, through the act of public communication and achievement, Dewey searched to build social solidarity and networks and form new publicness on political and ethical grounds. To him, democracy was conceived as “a way of living together,” rather than an administrative process. It was not fixed or deterministic, but creative and cooperative, which led to the act of communication. He had the intention of reviving the community and reconstructing publicness by this act.

Dewey started innovative school reform based on the principles of democracy and publicness. From the viewpoint that democracy and education involve a reciprocal concession, he sought to develop the school as a democratic agency. Protecting the accomplishments achieved by social participation through the cooperation of teachers and students, he was engaged in school reform that created social change and promoted the establishment of culture. The cooperation and solidarity of various agencies were protected against the bureaucratic system of the state and the market control of school education, raising an awareness of the meaning of the school and society in building networks. He thought that “a way of living together” was achieved

through creative and cooperative communication. The school, which formed the underlying principles of democracy and publicness, was understood to develop and mature on the basis of accomplishments by the public who constituted and created these networks.

### **An additional remarks**

This thesis was funded by a Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research made available by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology in the 2006 to 2009 fiscal years.

### **Notes**

- 1) Dewey, John, *Liberalism and Social Action*, *John Dewey: The Later Works*, Vol. 11, edited by Boydston, Jo Ann, Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987, p.41.
- 2) Westbrook, Robert B., *John Dewey and American Democracy*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991, pp.430-431.
- 3) Ryan, Alan, *John Dewey and the High Tide of American Liberalism*, New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1995.
- 4) Dewey, John, *Liberalism and Social Action*, op. cit., p.44.
- 5) Dewey, John, *Human Nature and Conduct*, *John Dewey: The Middle Works*, vol.14.
- 6) Dewey, John, *The Public and Its Problems*, *John Dewey: The Later Works*, vol.2, p.289.
- 7) Ibid., p.290.
- 8) Ibid., pp.291-292.
- 9) Ibid., p.294.
- 10) Ibid., p.294.
- 11) Ibid., p.299.
- 12) Ibid., p.299.
- 13) Ibid., p.242-247.
- 14) Ibid., pp.243-244.
- 15) Ibid., pp.243-244.
- 16) Ibid., p.244.
- 17) Ibid., pp.304-324.

- 18) Wallas, Graham, *The Great Society*, New York; Macmillan, 1914.
- 19) Dewey, John, *The Public and Its Problems*, op. cit., pp.295-296.
- 20) Ibid., pp.323-324.
- 21) Ibid., p.351.
- 22) Ibid., p.329.
- 23) Ibid., p.330.
- 24) Ibid., p.330.
- 25) Dewey, John, *Liberalism and Social Action*, op. cit., p.45.
- 26) Ibid., p.45.
- 27) Ibid., pp.6-7.
- 28) Ibid., p.7.
- 29) Ibid., p.8.
- 30) Ibid., pp.7-8.
- 31) Ibid., p.11.
- 32) Ibid., pp.9-11.
- 33) Ibid., pp.20-23.
- 34) Dewey, John, "Future of Liberalism," *The Later Works*, Vol. 11, p.258.
- 35) Dewey, John, "Democracy Is Radical," *The Later Works*, Vol. 11, pp.297-299.
- 36) Dewey, John, "Education and Social Change," *The Later Works*, Vol. 11, p.417.
- 37) Dewey, John, "Democracy and Educational Administration," *The Later Works*, Vol. 11, pp.217-218.
- 38) Ibid., p.217.
- 39) Ibid., p.225.
- 40) Ibid., p.218.
- 41) Dewey, John, *Individualism, Old and New*, *The Later Works*, Vol. 5, p.102.
- 42) Ibid., pp.101-102.
- 43) Ibid., p.103.
- 44) Dewey, John, *Freedom and Culture*, *The Later Works*, Vol. 13, p.67.
- 45) Ibid., p.67.
- 46) Ibid., p.79.
- 47) Dewey, John, "How Much Freedom in New Schools?," *The Later Works*, Vol. 5, pp.319-320.

- 48) Ibid., pp.324-325.
- 49) Ibid., pp.319-325.
- 50) Dewey, John, "The Social Significance of Academic Freedom," *The Later Works*, Vol. 11, p. 376.
- 51) Ibid., pp.376-379.
- 52) Dewey, John, "Toward a National System of Education," *The Later Works*, Vol. 11, pp.356-359.
- 53) Dewey, John, "Democracy and Education in the World of Today," *The Later Works*, Vol. 13, p.294.
- 54) Dewey, John, "The Challenge of Democracy to Education," *The Later Works*, Vol. 11, pp.181-190.
- 55) Ibid., pp.181-190.
- 56) Dewey, John, "Education and Social Change," op. cit., p.409.