

PROMOTING DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY IN ETHIOPIA: A PATHWAY TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

This article critically assesses John Dewey's philosophical thought which continues to be influential and important to this day in the development of a democratic society. He was a philosopher who devoted to his philosophical career to addressing and intellectualizing social problems. His pragmatic philosophical perspective is more adequate than other philosophies, especially to Ethiopian society by providing a reflective ideas more practical and helpful in the process of developing a democratic society, formulating better educational system, creating democratic outlooks and social values in which all members of a society can commonly and cooperatively share, experienced, and habituated in their life. This article will argue so far that Dewey's pragmatic philosophy is useful and would be a path in achieving a sustainable development in Ethiopia by playing such role to promote the democratic values, principles and institutions as well as the welfare of the Society.

Keywords: Democratic Society, Education, Ethiopia, Pragmatic Perspective, Sustainable Developmet

INTRODUCTION

John Dewey was a great American philosopher and one of the founders of the philosophical movement of pragmatism. He was educational theories, social critic and political activist. Dewey's pragmatic philosophy tell us that through the application and practice of intelligent philosophic inquiry, peoples can overcome various individual and social problematic situations, and acquire knowledge and experience which entail not only how to satisfy their material and spiritual needs, desires, interests, and aims, but also how to shape and control their environmental realities, social, political, ethical, cultural, or economic situations, habits and actions into rational intelligence and inquiry.

Dewey's philosophy can be a path to a sustainable development through fruitful and reflective inquiry into the traditions, beliefs, and experiences of the society that promotes a democratic social transformation. Therefore, more than any other philosophies, the pragmatic philosophy of Dewey is more important by virtue of being helpful in the process of rational and philosophic reconstruction of the experiences and traditions as well as fundamental philosophical thoughts, outlooks and attitudes of the society which in turn provides tools that enhance and produce sustainable transformation and change in the society. His entire career as a philosopher and public intellectual was devoted to find out an adequate rational explanation and response to the great social transformation that American people experienced towards the end of 19th and the beginning of 20th century. He believed that social transformation require progressively continuing institutional reform and change moved through a critical and intellectual guiding ideas and concepts dedicate to bring a democratically build development in the real life of the community as well as the individual.

Accordingly, these days of Ethiopian philosophers and public intellectuals have a task of critically reconstruct, investigate, clarify, examine, and justify the experiences, beliefs and traditions of the society within different institutions. Their concern and academic dedication should be for finding and promoting reflective philosophical ideas, knowledge, and thought which can enlighten the members of the society to bring and realize democratic change and development that can be experienced in the social life of the community. Such intellectual contribution promotes Ethiopians not only to be active participants into the social transformation and reform who are equipped with cognitive knowledge and intelligent understanding about moral, political, social, economic or cultural realities, but also enables them to experience a democratic social life, as Dewey argued that "the dominant vocation of all human beings at all times is living – intellectual and moral growth" (Dewey, 1944:310).

Accordingly, as Claude Ake argued "if people are the end of development, then their well-being is the supreme law of development... But the only one way to ensure that social transformation is not dissociated from the well-being of the people is to institute democracy" (Claude Ake, *Democracy and Development in Africa*, pp: 127). A democratic society provides an overall human development and opportunity through scientific inquiry which is a necessary constituent to achieve sustainable development in the society. Its role in developing a democratic culture and peaceful coexistence is unquestionable. In democratic societies, every actor is expected to contribute its part to promote a democratic environment where sustainable development could flourish.

DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY AND EDUCATION

The value of democratic society and education to the development of a democratically constituted society based on a pragmatic perspective is unquestionable. The growths of political, economic, cultural and moral aspects of social life and

situations are very essential to the development of a democratic society. But, the one that deals with here is how democratic society develops concerning the role of progressive education, particularly among others. The quest for a democratic society is valued the most because it can provide a good life for all members of the society which they can share and pursue commonly. John Dewey argued that political freedoms and rights of the people are insecure, and even it cannot develop in isolation unless the democratic habit of thought and action are part of the foundational character of those people. It must be supported “by the presence of democratic methods in all social relationships” (Dewey, 1946: 66). Furthermore, he noted that;

No matter what the fine ideals or fine resources, of the products of the experience, past human culture, exist somewhere at the center, they become significant only as they are carried out, or as distributed. That is true of any society, not simply a democratic society; but what is true of a democratic society is, of course, that its special values and its special purposes and aims must receive such distribution that they become part of the mind and the will of the member of the society. so that the school in a democracy is contributing, if it is true to itself as an educational agency, to the democratic ideal of making knowledge and understanding, in short, the power of action, the part of the intelligence and character of the individuals (Dewey, 1946:37).

In Dewey’s view, it is the responsibility of a democratic society to ensure that the improvement of individual intrinsic capacity preparing them to involve in active intelligent participation and self-understanding. In case after case, Dewey’s pragmatic philosophy tell us that through the application and practice of intelligent philosophic inquiry, men can overcome various individual and social problematic situations, and acquire knowledge and experience which entail not only how to satisfy their material and spiritual needs, desires, interests and aims, but also how to shape and control their environmental realities, social, political, ethical, cultural, or economical situations, habits and actions into rational intelligence and inquiry.

Society is a single word, but Dewey said that it refers to an "infinitely many things. It covers all how by associating together men share their experiences and build up common interests and aims" (Dewey, 1920:200). In other words, society means an “association; coming together in joint intercourse and action for the better realization of any form of experience which is augmented and confirmed by being shared” (1920:205). Thus, a democratically developed society can satisfy the interests and desires of all individual members in so far as the realization of their experiences and actions improved and confirmed for the common purpose of all members of the society.

Dewey believed that a pragmatic philosophical perspective should provide means to society that lead it to meet the challenges of democracy and building democratic systems, outlooks, beliefs, principles, and practices within all social institutions in which every member of that society can equally and actively participate. Society can realize the continuous development of all human aspects and build a democratic community where individuals habituated a democratic thought and action. Dewey was highly influenced by Darwin's evolutionary theory; accordingly, he argued that the overall development of humanity and society is in the state of continuous change, reform or transmission and progress. He said that "society exists through a process of transmission quite as much as biological life. This transmission occurs utilizing communication of habits of doing, thinking, and feeling from the older to the younger. Without this communication of ideals, hopes, expectations, standards, opinions, from those members of society who are passing out of the group life to those who are coming into it, social life could not survive” (Dewey, 1944:3).

The practical social action and interaction used as a tool for the justification and experimentation of various hypotheses formulated and developed based on the existing social problems and facts within a society. John Dewey was the one who most concerned about the philosophical inquiry on social problems through his pragmatic tradition. He redirects philosophy from the quest for absolute truth toward the actual human and social problems and situations as well. He suggested that pragmatism as a philosophy of action that creates a place for the practical application of creative intelligence to provide appropriate solutions to the existing social problems. The very important step in this process is the formulation of problems through intellectual inquiry to hypothesize the necessary and possible solutions. A significant number of development elites and academic institutions anonymously agreed on the importance of democracy for poverty reduction and sustainable development. Accordingly, most developing countries involve in and promote the democratization process and as an instrument of poverty alleviation and achieve prosperity.

For that matter, the educated members of the society have a vital function, position and task in the realization of growth and development within that society every member commonly shared and pursued together. That means, when knowledge of individuals matured and developed, s/he be able to actively and effectively participate in the continuing process of experiencing and sharing community life. According to Dewey, community life does not organize itself in an enduring way purely spontaneously. It requires thought and planning in the process and development of a democratic society (Dewey, 1938(a):56).

Hence, education has an essential function for society to produce educated and intellectual members. As Irwin Edman noted, Dewey insisted that the core to the meaningful life in the society is growth; the continuous transmission, the reshaping, and "the remaking of experience. The enemy of life is rigidity and blind resistance to change. The function of intelligence is to alertly critical of outmoded methods in the society, in government, in feeling, in thought" (Edman, 1955:31). Thus, the role of intellectuals in society has to modify and readjust problematic experiences in a way that produces the kind of knowledge which can solve and tackle the concrete social problems, and make sure that the society is continuing into the transmission of democratic life experience.

As already identified above, society is associated with individuals under the common needs and aims, so that those individual members "demand a growing interchange of thought and growing unity of sympathetic feeling. The radical reason that the present school cannot organize itself as a natural social unit is that just this element of common and productive activity is absent" (Dewey, 1943:14). The commitment to intellectualize the problematic situations is one of the significant and important characteristics of pragmatic tradition in his social and political philosophy. Because Dewey believed that philosophical inquiry on social problems is an ongoing interconnected process of experience to transform those problems into an intelligence form.

Today, what people consider as the most important value of pragmatism is that its practical application of knowledge for solving societal problems, and this becomes a remarkable reason which qualifies Dewey's social and political philosophy. Philosophy, he said, "can make it easier for mankind to take the right steps in action by making it clear that a sympathetic and integral intelligence brought to bear upon the observation and understanding of concrete social events and forces, can form ideals, that is aims, which shall not be either illusion or mere emotional compensations" (Dewey, 1920:131).

Dewey claimed that the attaining of knowledge which has inherent to all persons and knowing with experimentation involved in the action to the discovering and intellectualizing of social problems. Such a process of acquiring intelligence should not be left only for a few individuals to influence society (Dewey, 1951:529). In other words, if the individuals failed to manipulate their intelligence, s/he will lose the opportunity of contributing towards future growth and development in their society, likewise, freedom of individuals suppresses unless they use it in the experience of democracy within their daily activities with the help of education. Experience, according to Dewey's pragmatic perspective, "should do something to prepare a person for later experiences of a deeper and more expansive quality. That is the very meaning of growth, continuity, and reconstruction of experiences" (Dewey, 1938:47, EE). Thus, he thought that social situations are not only fully disclosing the potential change of the society towards growth and development, but also it becomes intellectually known and unified.

The common good life and growth of society are possible through the realization of social progress, supported by an ongoing rational process. In such a process of social life, the role pragmatic inquiry partly performs through intellectual inquiry, clarification and evaluation of ideas, concepts as well as hypotheses, whether or not they can solve the social problems raises on/from different issues. It can also prove their capability to meet and address the needs and aims of the society. John Dewey said that;

Rationalistic logic formerly made men careless in observation of the concrete in physical philosophy. It now operates to depress and retard observation in specific social phenomena. The social philosopher, dwelling in the region of his concepts, "solves " problems by showing the relationship of ideas, instead of helping men solve problems in the concrete by supplying them hypotheses to be used and tested in projects of reform. (Dewey, 1920:191-92).

Therefore, individuals can have this intelligent understanding and awareness about their personal or social problems is developing through the help of education. As he argued that "A communal way of conceiving life grows up into which individuals are inducted by education. Both unconsciously and by definite social requirement individual memories are assimilated to group memory or tradition and individual fancies are accommodated to the body of beliefs characteristic of a community" (Dewey, 1920:8).

Along with this reason, Dewey believed that education is a necessary tool for social life to provide progress and realize a common good in a society based upon the intelligent inquiries of social problems and their possible solutions. Therefore, a critically constructed experience of individual's itself can be applied to the meaningful struggle of social life. The struggle for a meaningfully democratic society relies on the realization of a critical reconstruction of the potential experience of individuals towards the possible growth and development.

According to J. Ratner, the primary concern of Dewey's pragmatic thought is dealing with actual social conditions involved to intellectualized and generalized problems or 'social questions' such as the relation of different social institutions to individuality, the justification of a refined culture for a few in face of economic insufficiency for the mass, the value of education and research for social progress and so on which involve in a continuous philosophic inquiry. These are considered as a reflective enterprise of rational thought in his philosophy that qualified its significance in the contemporary range of philosophic interest and work. No one of common sense would confused and substitute the social questions, or

intellectualized social problems with that of actual social conditions, and treating the social questions as self-sufficient in themselves as being the primary and original subject-matter and pushing the actual social conditions completely to one side and irrelevant (Ratner, 1951:50-51). Many social problems and questions raise out from the actual social conditions, thus a reflective and critical individuals experience become an essential component in the ongoing process of developing a democratic society. For that matter education has an essential and necessary function to the society through the help of individuals to attain a critical and reflective experience. As Dewey said, "things which are socially most fundamentals that is, which have related to do with the experience in which the widest group share, are the essentials" (Dewey, 1944:191).

Dewey argued that "democratic society is peculiarly dependent for its maintenance upon the use in forming a course of study of criteria which are broadly human" (1944:192). In other words, democracy is a quality of social interactions to be achieved rather than an abstract imperative, procedure, or set of decisions. This concept of democracy is founded on actual public encounters with in the society and its situations.

Dewey pointed out that a democratically constituted society has a characteristic of a "more numerous and more varied points of shared interests." It also characterized by its "greater reliance upon the recognition of mutual interest as a factor in social control." That means, there is not only "free interaction between social groups," but also a desirable "change is a social habit" develop and emerge acquired by the process of "continuous readjustment through meeting the new situations produced by varied intercourse" among the social life (1944:86-87). To attain progress and development in society concerning democratic attitude institutions such as state, religious institutions, family, law, and others are very necessary ingredients. Yet, among others, education helps individuals to understand that they all are two sides of the same reality, and they are communally necessary and helpful to each other in a democratically constituted society.

A society, according to Dewey, "which makes provision for participation in its good of all its members on equal terms and which secures flexible readjustment of its institutions through interaction of different forms of associated life is in so far democratic. Such a society must have a type of education which gives individuals a personal interest in social relationships and control, and the habit of the mind which secures social changes without introducing disorder" (1944:99). The active participants of social life provide equal opportunity and the right to have their interests and desires mutually go with society's aims and projects with the help of education. The continuous existence of social life toward change and progress within a democratic sphere is ensured by the active participation of all members of the social group who are interested and respected that life of the society.

The necessity of education to society and social life is the fundamental thing that the nature of life denotes to continue and ensure its survival and existence. As Dewey argued that "the communal way of conceiving life grows up into which individuals are inducted by education" (Dewey, 1920:8) and even "the heart of the sociality of man is in education" (1920:185). Therefore, the social life in a democratic society characterized by the continuous renewal of its interests and aims, which is what essentially constitutes society, consists of the educative process of transmission and mutual communication among members of the society. This educative process includes not only rational and intellectual communication but also active and effective participation with a socially purposeful and cooperative inquiry of experiences and solving problems.

Hence, Dewey said that "a democratic society must, in consistency with its ideal, allow for intellectual freedom and the play of diverse gifts and interests in its educational measures" (Dewey, 1944:305). Society must give rise to freedoms and rights of the individuals when they experienced mutual communication and cooperation to develop a democratic society and realize a social transformation in which society unifies and liberates each of its members and such progress towards a democratically constituted society is realized through the pragmatic perspective of the educative process.

RETHINKING DEMOCRACY AND CREATING SOCIAL VALUE

Democracy, according to John Dewey, designates more than just a political activity, practices and principles in various institutions of the community and social life. He believed that democracy signifies a commitment to a free intellectual exploration of the possibilities of the future. As Dewey argued that "freer interactions between social groups" and "continuous readjustment through meeting the new situations produced" are some of the important things among others democracy can provide to realize "change in social habits." It also signifies challenges and opportunities in a society identified through a free investigation and exploration of social life and experience. The concept of democracy refers to "not only more numerous and more varied points of shared interests, but greater reliance upon the recognition of mutual interests as a factor in social control" (Dewey, 1944: 86). Thus, the practice of democracy must be used in every aspect of sharing experiencing and offering the best opportunity for every individual member of society. In that way, like education, mutual communication and sharing of experience could lead members of the society not only to develop and maintain an intelligent habit of free choice and decision but also to provide effective social life shared among the community. Along these, Dewey's socio-political philosophy tried to promote and adopt a more legitimate democratic attitude, principles, and practices in the society

As said above, Dewey's view of democracy included much broader and deeper concepts than just a mode of governmental practices and activities. A kind of democracy that he promoted develops when individuals habituate free critical choice and agreed up, to live mutually and cooperatively with others in the society irrespective of perfecting their natural rights and freedoms. This does not mean that the natural rights and freedoms of individuals should reject, but a democratically constituted social life and tradition can provide an opportunity for individuals to experience their rights and freedom. He said, "democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience" (1944: 87). In addition to that, democracy has also a moral concept that signifies a shared and communicated the social life of the community. He said that "democracy has many meanings, but if it has a moral meaning, it is found in resolving that the supreme test of all political institutions and industrial arrangements shall be the contribution they make to the all-around growth of every member of the society" (Dewey, 1920: 86).

As already said earlier, education has an unavoidable function in developing a democratically constituted as well as structured society and tradition. School is a center in the continual process of transforming intelligent thought, feeling and practices of experience of the past generation to the next. It's also a place where the youngsters can learn and understand how to practically experience what they learn, and how to communicate with other members of society to offer a well developing democratic structure and tradition.

According to Dewey, "Society not only continues to exist by transmission, by communication, but with it may fairly be said to exist in transmission, in communication. ... Men live in a community in virtue of the things in which they come to possess

things in common. What they must have in common to form a community or society is aiming, beliefs, aspirations, knowledge – a common understanding" (Dewey, 1944:4). What individual member of the society learns through such educative process is not what to think, but how to think, how to identify, handle and solve social as well as personal problems. Along with this, social values create and develop in the community and social life. Thus, social values that connect individual members and their varied interests will commonly construct within the society through such a continuous educative social process.

The young generation got to disagree with that of the life custom and tradition of the society where they are born, the pragmatic path is to direct them towards the common understanding of the means and ends of actions for the good of the all and guide as a social control through the social conditions as well as situations in the society. According to Dewey, "The basic control resides like the situations in which the young have to refer their way of acting to what others are doing and make it fit in. This directs their activities to a common result, and gives an understanding common to the participants. ... This common understanding of the means and ends of action is the essence of social control. It is indirect, or emotional and intellectual, not direct or personal" (1944:39).

The social controlling, guiding, or directing of the younger generation has a face of either the young have to refer the way of acting what their society has to produce and generate good ends valuable for all members of the society, or the society enforces, not a direct physical or personal threat, the young to understand and obey to direct and guide their actions following the life-custom of the community. Thus, Dewey said, "to achieve this internal control through the identity of interest and understanding is the business of education." Schools badly need to have more opportunities for collective activities with a social sense of their power, the materials, and appliances used as their office for business (1944:3940).

Individual members of a society should give great attention to the social life that binds together in common aims and goals which finally lead that society to develop and grow a democratic society. They have to prize and esteem such a valuable social life and tradition because "to value means to prize, to esteem" according to Dewey (1944:238). Further on he claimed that to have social value in common all the members of the group must have an equal opportunity to receive and to take from others. As far as the society develops such value, it is reasonable to think that the society is doing a supreme job and it would be succeed in creating reflective traditions, democratic habits as a cognitive knowledge and outlooks, and social and moral values which are necessary and useful for the realization of democratic social transformation and better way of life in general. In such a society, democratic habit and outlook would be experienced, and their social institutions would fundamentally build upon a deep democratic ideas, principles and practices. It also provides a useful and constructive guidance for the development of unified and cooperative society.

CONCLUSION

Democratic principles and practices, broadly a way of life, solves all contemporary social problematic situations of any society. It can lead to the social transformation and change of the way of the life of any society in which every member of that social group become not only satisfied and interested in, but also experienced and shared communally. Dewey's pragmatic perspective indicates that democracy and education are closely linked and connected in the society who develop and build a democratic social life. Because, democracy is the framework of the situation or the subject matter of education,

and education, on the other hand, is the necessary function and instrument of the society to bring continuous progress and change.

Democracy can maintain and develop through the active participation of intelligent members of society in making decisions and solving problems. Thus, the educational process and its subject matter are related to the social transformation and change which the democratic society needs to realize and experienced as well as shared among its members. This kind of educational process in the democratic society can develop and prepare the learners who understand the idea, principles, and practices of democracy, and create a social value, democratic outlooks and habits of action that bring all members to live communally through mutual communication and cooperation.

All member of a developing society would be better off if the social life were conducted with in a democratic institutions that are recognized according to the framework of democratic principles and values which may include; fairness, transparency, accountability, active participation, responsiveness, well-management, efficiency and effectiveness among others. Such a society can realize a culture of democratic society in which good governance is exercised. Good governance is one of the most important global agenda for poverty alleviation and sustainable development. Since democratization is a vital precondition for poverty reduction process and achieves sustainable development, as it would provide citizens with the opportunity to participate and develop policies and strategies that would be their best interests.

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