GLOBALIZATION AND PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION

Joseph Watras
University of Dayton

The term “globalization” is relatively new. Alfred E. Eckes, Jr. and Thomas W. Zeiler credit Theodore Levitt for coining the word in 1983 in an article in the *Harvard Business Review*. In a short time, other authors adopted the term. Thomas Friedman, for example, used the phrase to define the 1990s. Friedman claimed that the world had entered a new era because free market capitalism brought about the integration of countries and the standardization of cultures.¹

Scholars disagree about the effects of the worldwide changes. Although Friedman claimed he did not admire globalization, he asserted that countries that had McDonald restaurants never went to war with each other. On the other hand, critics of the spread of multinational corporations such as Ken Saro-Wiwa contended that corporations such as Shell Oil Company deprived indigenous people of their homes, their livelihoods, and their lives.² In 2003, UNESCO adopted a convention to safeguard such cultural inheritances as language, performing arts, rituals, and skills with crafts, warning that globalization caused people to disparage older, more traditional ways of life.³

The aim of this paper is to describe the efforts of two philosophers of education who tried to preserve the values of democracy in the face of extensive social changes going on during their lifetimes. The subjects are William Torrey Harris and John Dewey. In general, they used the same approach. First, they described the forces that brought about social change. Second, they tried to find aspects of democracy within the forces moving toward change. Third, the educators tried to turn those forces in ways that reinforced the traditional value they wanted to pursue.

Although Harris and Dewey were contemporaries, Harris was Dewey’s senior. Harris began his work in education shortly after the U.S. Civil War while Dewey did most of his work in education while he taught at the University of Chicago during the turn of the twentieth century. During the period they worked, the United States changed from a collection of isolated hamlets and small cities surrounded by wilderness to become a continent wide industrial society, an urban nation, and a world power. In a short time railroads spread across the land, facilitating transportation. Manufacturers increased production and the U.S. Census declared in 1920 that most Americans lived in cities. Although Americans admired the success of companies such as U.S. Steel to dominate the market, the factories exploited workers, harmed consumers, and polluted the environment. As a result, from about 1890 to 1917, progressive politicians tried to turn the methods of organization that fueled the corporations into the means of social improvement.4

According to Lawrence Cremin, progressive educators in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century applied the methods of the wider progressive political movement to schools. In Cremin’s eyes, educators were humanitarians who wanted to achieve the ideal of government for, by, and of the people through schools. As a result, many educators wanted schools to adopt techniques similar to those found in business or industry.5

SEEKING TO LIMIT BUREAUCRACY

Both Harris and Dewey tried to act in broad, humane ways. According to Cremin, increasing numbers of children attended schools in the 1880s and 1890s. Cremin added that W. T. Harris offered a philosophy to show that regular arrangements, supervised instruction, standardized textbooks, and the collection of statistics would aid the development of the country. Cremin noted that Harris used the philosophy of Georg Friedrich Hegel to explain how students could undertake sequential lessons and regular examinations within a disciplined framework to become self-active individuals who could exercise their freedom in their civilization.6

Harris combined the insights of a philosopher with those of a practical school administrator. He served as superintendent of St. Louis public schools from 1869 until 1879, when he resigned to work in the Concord Summer School of Philosophy. He founded the Journal of Speculative Philosophy, where he published articles about the ideas of Hegel. In 1889 U.S. President Benjamin Harrison appointed Harris to be the fourth U. S. Commissioner of Education, an office Harris held office until 1906. While serving in this post,

6 Ibid, 14-20.
Harris remained active in the National Education Association, where he continued to deliver papers and serve on such committees as the Committee of Ten in 1892 to determine the proper secondary curriculum and the Committee of Fifteen in 1895 to determine the curriculum for elementary schools. Although Merle Cremin credited Harris with creating the first American philosophy of education, Curti contended that Harris rationalized nationalism, imperialism, and industrialism. For Curti, the fault lay in Harris’ claim that people achieved freedom when they accepted the existing social system. Contemporary commentators find Curti’s complaints excessive. For example, when Michael H. DeArmey and James A. Good collected selections from Harris’s *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, they noted that Harris expressed a strong commitment to democracy. He considered the U.S. Civil War as a turning point when Americans turned away from the individualism of capitalists, abolitionists, and slaveholders to embrace the idea that well founded social institutions advanced human rights. Furthermore, DeArmy and Good point out that as early as 1867 Harris urged religious enthusiasts to move beyond emotional appeals to seek the rational basis for faith. In addition, DeArmey and Good add that Harris warned that scientific materialism could undermine morality. According to Peter Collins, the humanistic ideas found in Harris’ *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* appear in the annual reports he wrote for St. Louis schools and in his other works.

Harris published his final text in 1896. The title, *Psychologic Foundations of Education*, implied that psychology was the study of the philosophical presuppositions of mental life. In his text, Harris eschewed conceptions of mind as an organ of the body that received influences from the environment. Instead, he considered the mind to be a self-active energy that originated its own feelings or thoughts. More important, Harris argued that thoughts moved through three distinct levels. The first was sense perception wherein a person considered objects to have independent existences. The second level recognized that objects depended on their environments. The third level recognized that true being was entirely intellect and will. Because Harris contended that intellect was a final or ultimate principle in the world, he believed that his descriptions of psychology would explain all phenomena in terms of a final or ultimate principle, and this was the purview of philosophy.

The key to Harris’ conception of psychology was the concept of self-activity. To Harris, the meaning of term was broader than the view that people think for

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themselves. Harris held that self-activity meant everything functioned within a larger system and each thing moved itself toward some ultimate being. For example, a plant demonstrated self-activity when it grew buds, leaves, roots, and branches. This was self-activity because the plant grew by itself even though it took matter from the environment to accomplish this feat. Animals added locomotion to self-activity because the animal moved with some internal purpose or design. Human beings added thinking to self-activity. Harris argued that people could perceive self-activity in themselves through introspection. Once they found self-activity in themselves, they could recognize that Nature developed beings that possessed internality and realized their own ideals. As a result, Harris associated the final stage of thinking—reason—with the capacity to look for total beings within a complete system.\(^\text{10}\)

Self-activity implied a complete system because all independent beings moved toward a creator who was above time and space. Since Harris thought that the human will was a form of self-activity, he added that philosophers could observe the steps such consciousness or introspection took. At the lowest level, children or “savages” concerned themselves with sense perceptions. More “cultured” individuals reflected on the subjective phases of perception and conducted experiments to determine if defects in sense organs altered those perceptions. According to Harris, philosophers recognized that consciousness was active at all levels. Most important, philosophers could recognize that their perceptions aligned with an original cause within the universe. They could move through such a progression of insights because self-activity had made possible freedom of their wills.\(^\text{11}\)

Harris wrote his text for teachers because he believed that psychology illuminated the progression that brought the different human capacities into harmony with each other. Teachers had to understand the progression these different psychologies implied if they wanted to help students move through the appropriate stages of development. According to Harris, these stages fit within an ascending arrangement of the institutions through which children passed. Nonetheless, it was not easy to recognize how these psychologies worked together. For example, the psychology of the family contradicted the psychology of the state. Within the family, the child learned obedience and developed personal habits such as cleanliness that served his personal growth. In the state, however, individuals had to sacrifice their own desires for the greater good of the whole.\(^\text{12}\)

In a similar manner, the faculties engendered in the different branches of studies contradicted each other. For example, mathematics dealt with quantities of objects while literature showed the growth of human feelings. Although Harris warned that a person could not apply the ways of thinking found in

\(^\text{10}\) Ibid, 20-31.
\(^\text{11}\) Ibid., 114-119.
\(^\text{12}\) Ibid., v-x, 32-37, 257-268.
mathematics to literature, he believed the higher levels of thinking resolved these contradictions. The danger was that teachers would try to harmonize the different faculties in superficial ways by combining skills or subjects, as when a teacher introduced a lesson in grammar while the class read a literary story. In this case, logic clashed with aesthetic sensibilities. The result of mixing lessons superficially was that teachers prevented the students from mastering any one quality of thinking and thereby prevented them from moving to a higher model of thought wherein each quality appeared in a different form.\(^\text{13}\)

To describe the different types of thinking engendered by academic subjects, Harris used the word “faculty.” When he did this he was not referring to the discredited notion of faculty psychology, which was the view that the brain had different talents such as memory or judgment. Under the theory of faculty psychology, rigorous studies such as Greek or mathematics could exercise these specific talents. While Harris would acknowledge that people acquired the qualities of thinking through self-activity, they did not arise through unfolding the innate human qualities as faculty psychology defined them. In Harris’ eyes, the human will enabled a person to acquire perspectives from sense perceptions, social institutions, or branches of human knowledge. Through self-activity a person could enlist his or her will to restrain some perceptions or to combine various perceptions and gain insights.\(^\text{14}\)

It was in the psychology of social science that Harris explained how individuals availed themselves of the combined observations of their predecessors to ascend from savagery and develop civilized values. For example, as people satisfied their material needs, they moved into spiritual realms and changed the quality of their aims or desires. When people sought food or clothing, they sought things that served one person. As a result, material pursuits reinforced selfishness. When people began to share ideas, their thoughts deepened and expanded because they acquired new perspectives. As a result, people thought differently when they sought to satisfy material needs than when they pursued ideas—they came to perceive the interests they shared with other people.\(^\text{15}\)

Although Harris argued that institutions such as families, civil society, and the state arose as people satisfied their bodily needs, he claimed that these institutions combined in ways that gave ethical content to the society. For example, in civil society people worked at vocations to earn regular salaries that they used to buy the necessities of life that other people produced for them. Thus, the social whole fulfilled everyone’s personal wants. When people worked hard and long to accumulate more goods, they might appear selfish; however, the extra labor produced more goods that fulfilled other people’s needs. Thus, selfishness moved into generosity as workers ascended into a

\(^{13}\) Ibid., 325-327.

\(^{14}\) Ibid., 244-245.

\(^{15}\) Ibid., 254-257.
realm where they worked for themselves and for others. Finally, through a system of exchange, they worked for themselves through others as well. To Harris, this was another indication of the totality of existence because the best expression of the lower stage depended on its movement toward the higher.\footnote{Ibid., 258-260.}

As one might predict from what appeared above, Harris thought the highest form of education came from the church because religion enabled people to know themselves as beings that transcended Nature. Nonetheless, Harris acknowledged the child received important lessons from the family, the civil society, and the state. Within this web of institutions, the school played an important role. For example, during the first eight years of school, children acquired the disciplines of arithmetic, geography, history, grammar, and literature. Each of these studies employed a specific category of the mind, and when the students could combine them, they enabled students to take up human existence. As a result, he called these subjects the five windows of the soul.\footnote{Ibid., 321-324.}

Although Harris claimed that the subjects ultimately worked in combination, he wanted the students to learn them in a symmetrical fashion. For example, teachers should present each subject separately so the children could master the unique system of thinking that each subject required. In arithmetic and geography, students learned the categories of quantity and quality, which enabled them to recognize the existence of separate bodies and the relationships they had to each other. Literature asked students to recognize human nature as revealed through prose or poetry. Not only would children recognize the ways that feelings grew into deeds, they would recognize the relationships people had to their society. Grammar introduced the children to logic and to a consideration of reason itself. In grammatical exercises, the children had to look beyond the form of a word and perceive its meaning. Finally, history portrayed the development of institutions showing that states and individuals followed patterns of development that made them become more alike. Harris believed history would show the children how societies evolved from savagery where the individual and the group competed with each other to civilization where the state was an instrument enabling individuals to govern themselves.\footnote{Ibid., 325-332.}

For Harris, secondary schools and colleges continued the elementary course of study in more advanced fashions. Although secondary school introduced some new subjects such as foreign and classical language instruction, secondary schools tried to reach different goals than did elementary schools. Where elementary schools introduced skills and information, high schools introduced things or events as parts of processes. For example, in elementary schools, students learned arithmetic and solved problems using particular numbers. In high school, students learned algebra where they
encountered rules that applied to many different examples. In classical and foreign language instruction, students learned the structure of language and came to see the different ways of thinking of people in different lands.\textsuperscript{19} Colleges offered higher and more important lessons than did the high schools. At this level, the students acquired ethical insight because they came to see how the various branches of knowledge functioned within the totality of civilization. This was important, for these students would become the leaders in their communities after they graduated. They would manage education, enter the ministry, or become medical practitioners. Harris added that the college training imbued students with a conservative frame of mind because they realized that institutions had profound reasons for existing.\textsuperscript{20}

For this paper, it is important to see that Harris used his understanding of Hegel to show how the social changes underway during his life advanced human freedom. As noted above, Harris considered the assertion of federal authority through the U. S. Civil War as part of an inevitable process to advance human freedoms. While the nineteenth century unfolded, more and more agencies sought to bring ever-increasing portions of people’s lives under centralized management. Harris’ participation in the National Education Association and his work as U.S. Commissioner of Education illustrate his desire to further such national supervision. In these efforts, though, Harris tried to recognize how central control preserved traditional values of freedom. For example, Harris approved of compulsory education laws because schools offered children access to the freedoms the state provided, and national agencies provided guidance to improve all schools.

The important point for this essay is that Harris tried to show how the increased importance of central authorities such as the federal government could benefit everyone. Before the U. S. Civil War, Americans thought the autonomy of local communities preserved democracy. This meant local control of institutions such as schools and personal ways of interaction. After the U.S Civil War, the federal government increased its authority. For the central government to be a force for the good of humanity, Harris claimed they had to adopt another definition of democracy. Instead of seeing autonomy as democratic, they would have to see democracy as the efforts to treat people equitably and to spread opportunities throughout the population.

**The Role of Pragmatism**

Despite Harris’ belief in the need to seek freedom through an advanced society, his ideas had fell out of fashion by the time he published *Psychologic Foundations of Education*. According to biographer Kurt F. Leidecker, the book was a monument of the point of view most educators had shared with

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 334-337.

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 339-340
Harris.\textsuperscript{21} He added that the University of Jena in Germany awarded Harris an honorary degree the following year in recognition of his efforts to establish a philosophical basis for education. Nonetheless, Leidecker thought Harris’ book appeared too late. Few educators active at the turn of the twentieth century attended to the book. Their interests had turned away from Harris’ model as they gravitated toward pragmatism.

In 1898 John Dewey reviewed Harris’ \textit{Psychologic Foundations of Education}. Praising Harris for uniting the results of his long experience as an educational administrator and his interests in speculative philosophy as practiced by German idealists, Dewey added that Harris’s ideas had remained consistent from his early articles in the \textit{Journal of Speculative Philosophy} to this book. Dewey pointed out that Harris ignored the then current thinking about psychology and the efforts to apply it to education. Dewey added Harris’ description of the role of schools and the appropriate course of study made clear the defects of the present system. For example, Dewey quoted Harris to show that elementary school teachers focused on symbols of knowledge rather than contact with experience.\textsuperscript{22}

Despite Dewey’s criticism, the pragmatic model that Dewey offered was similar to Harris’ notion of speculative philosophy. Among the similar features, Dewey thought that human beings advanced their thinking from rudimentary levels to sophisticated ones. Like Harris, Dewey believed that the individual and the society grew towards increased freedom together and, like Harris, Dewey thought that the motive for personal growth came from within the individual.

Although Harris and Dewey may have shared aspects of the idealistic perspective, Dewey disagreed with Harris on two major points: the nature of thinking and the source of human development. On the question of the nature of thinking, Harris claimed that the rudimentary levels of thought and sophisticated models differed in their qualities or definitions. Dewey took another perspective, claiming there was one best way to think. The extent that levels of thought differed depended on how widely a person considered alternatives for action and resulting consequences. On the source of human development, Harris claimed that the human will was the source of motive power for this movement. Dewey agreed that the force for growth came from within but believed human interest powered the development or growth of people.

As noted above, Harris explained how higher activities derived from lower ones by appealing to what he called the psychology of civilization.


Dewey had a similar desire; however, he changed Harris’ concept of self-activity into something more practical by asking about the ways living things used the forces in the environment in their own behalf. According to Dewey, living things changed or adapted their surroundings to fit their needs. Dewey added that when people formed into societies, these groups sought to preserve their customs and traditions by recreating their beliefs, hopes, and practices within the younger members of their groups. Most important, the process of communication helped everyone because it required that people enlarge and expand their imaginations to abstract meaning from any event or effort. Dewey applied the term “experience” to these different levels of renewal.²³ So, while Harris called on teachers to engage in introspection to understand how people think, Dewey asked them to think about experience. Although both philosophers wanted teachers to think about their thinking, each of them asked the teachers to go about this process differently.

According to Dewey, experiences had two sides. One side was a doing and the other side was an undergoing. The combination enabled people to learn because after they did something, they had to suffer the consequences. Thinking entered when the person wanted to direct those consequences in a certain way or toward a certain goal. To achieve some end, the person had to recognize the possible connections among a set of actions and the consequences they would have. When Dewey described the best way for someone to engage in this type of thinking, he described the scientific method. This involved posing a problem, gathering evidence, making a suggestion, and proving a point.²⁴ For Dewey, the scientific method was something everyone should use. It was something young children could employ as well as the means to assist experts in advanced studies. The difference between these levels was not a difference in quality but in the extent to which they involved complicated or distant circumstances.

As for the motive power behind growth, Dewey believed that the process of thinking began with a personal impulse or desire. A person had to have an aim or the individual would perform a welter of activities in a mindless fashion. Dewey proclaimed that acting with an aim was to act intelligently because the aim gave direction to the activities. Thus, Dewey noted that even though the duty of the school was to help children master the scientific process, teachers could not make students memorize the steps. To learn to think scientifically, the children had to use the method to achieve something they wanted to accomplish. Because the scientific method began with some desire or doubt, children had to have these feelings before they moved on to the other steps. This meant that the aim had to come from what the child was already

²⁴ Ibid., 139-151.
doing. At the same time, the aim should change as the experience unfolded and it should encourage the person to persist in the activity.²⁵

Because Dewey began with a consideration of practical activities, he did not use the spiritual connotations of self-activity or refer to the human will as Harris had. Where Harris claimed that self-activity came from the will, Dewey took the view that the quality people called will derived from activities that had aims. According to Dewey, when people engaged in activities to achieve their aims, they could recognize the connection between their present conditions and the ends they desired. Dewey defined interest as the recognition of these connections. He added that interest helped people persist because they foresaw an anticipated end, marshaled their resources and directed their efforts. Since discipline was function of interest, Dewey gave the name “will” to intelligent persistence, which he distinguished from stubbornness.²⁶

Because Dewey began by asking how people and other living things turned the environment to serve themselves, he believed that the impulse for thinking derived from the fundamental concerns for food, shelter, and clothing. When he translated this observation to planning school studies, he suggested turning lessons into occupations. He may have borrowed the name “occupation” from kindergarten teachers who used the word to describe the symbolic activities children did with Froebel’s gifts. Unlike kindergarten teachers, Dewey wanted the occupations to be practical activities, such as gardening, but he did not want these occupations to garner profits. He thought the activity could serve as an avenue for knowledge about the development of society as well as concerns about chemistry and botany if the children did not have to worry whether their gardens produced sufficient vegetables to keep them alive. In this way, a fundamental concern or instinct provided the impulse for undertaking a process of discovery that led to increasing engagement with civilization.²⁷

Academic subjects played important roles in Dewey’s occupations. For the instructor, the subject matter showed the direction that the occupation should take. That is, the subject matter indicated what sequence of steps students should follow so that they reconstructed the experiences of previous generations. For the students, the subject matters moved through three stages. First, they enabled the student to do something or overcome some problem. Second, subject matters told them about the experiences of other people; however, this information was only valuable when it grew out of the students’ concerns or fit their previous acquaintances. Finally, subject matters became collections of information arranged in logical patterns that experts could consult and manipulate. Consequently, Dewey believed that subject matters could introduce students to society if students began with activities related to

²⁵ Ibid., 100-110.
²⁶ Ibid., 124-138.
²⁷ Ibid., 194-206.
life outside school and looked on the subject matters as ways to utilize the
information culled from the experiences of other people.\textsuperscript{28}

In contrast, as noted above, Harris thought the academic subjects by
themselves could introduce the children to society. As a result, Harris rejected
vocational training as a school subject. In a sense, Dewey rejected vocational
training even though he argued that schools should accept a sort of vocational
orientation. Dewey opposed trade education because this appeared to
exacerbate social divisions. Instead, Dewey believed that the development of
industry came from the application of scientific findings. In fact, it appeared to
him that society depended on science for all forms of social life. As a result,
Dewey believed that science could improve children’s minds and characters.
By beginning with activities in which they had an interest, they developed
discipline and will. By working with other people in a cooperative manner,
they appreciated the benefits of a democratic social order. By learning to think
using the scientific method, students would learn how to control the force that
enabled the industries to grow and flourish. Thus, when schools introduced
students to science as a method of thinking, schools would become a means of
social reform.\textsuperscript{29}

Dewey shared Harris’ belief that organized society advanced human
freedom; however, while Harris thought of freedom as a spiritual quality,
Dewey considered freedom to be a quality of mind. When people could vary
their perspectives from the mode that custom decreed, society could grow
because the source of inspiration for scientific discoveries increased. A
progressive society would then look upon individual variation as a source of
innovation and the discovery of new methods of working and living. Thus,
freedom enabled individuals to improve society and thereby give themselves
more freedom.\textsuperscript{30}

In this regard, Dewey decided that the differences between civilized and
savage groups depended on their social lives, not on differences in their native
intelligence. In the case of underdeveloped peoples, primitive customs
restricted their observations and their imaginations. At the same time, Dewey
noted that material circumstances limited their thinking as well. Because the
primitive groups could not control natural resources to the extent that
industrialized nations could, the people had fewer opportunities to use the
available materials for their own ends. Thus, material and intellectual functions
reinforced each other. Because the group could do fewer things, the members
had more restricted aims.\textsuperscript{31}

The point here is that Dewey thought the important factor in social
change was the industrial one. This had led to the growth of worldwide
markets, vast manufacturing centers, and extensive systems of communication

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 180-193.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., 306-320.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 291-305.
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 36.
that had transformed peoples’ lives. For Dewey, industrial development had changed the nature of society. It had erased political boundaries, gathered people into cites, and altered peoples’ habits of life. He added this industrial revolution derived from the application of science to create inventions to serve people. Thus, Dewey believed that children could learn how to do things in ways that showed them how science and the scientific method had brought about human progress. Further, because scientific progress required the sharing of information and independence of thought, studies of industrial progress would have to demonstrate the superiority of democracy as a social order.\textsuperscript{32}

\textbf{CONCLUSION}

Harris and Dewey recommended different remedies to preserve the traditional values of democracy during times of extensive social changes; however, they followed similar steps to arrive at their suggestions. First, they described the forces that brought about social change. Second, they sought to find the core of traditional values within the shift. Finally, they tried to direct the forces of change in ways that reinforced those values. Because many of the problems they faced resembled the dangers of the contemporary drift toward globalization, educators today might be able to imitate the steps they took.