

**Nathan Crick.** *Dewey for a New Age of Fascism: Teaching Democratic Habits*. Penn State University Press 2019. 248 pp. \$99.95 USD (Hardcover ISBN 9780271084817); \$34.95 USD (Paperback ISBN 9780271084824).

Nathan Crick's *Dewey for a New Age of Fascism: Teaching Democratic Habits* brings the democratic humanist theories of John Dewey to the forefront of antiauthoritarian scholarship and twenty-first century politics. Through analyses of a range of Dewey's works, Crick illustrates how an education rooted in a collaboration-based logic, aesthetics, and rhetoric can be used to combat the isolating, propagandistic, and nationalistic societal elements that foster fascism. By deconstructing fascism's fundamental antihumanist pillars while providing humanist counters, Crick offers educators, and through them, students, hope to thwart dangerous evolving societal trends that may at times seem unstoppable.

While the book's title may give an impression that it is largely reactionary to contemporary political phenomena, its primary purpose is far greater and potentially timeless: to introduce readers to the enduring importance of Dewey's works in not just education, but also in every aspect of society. This is done by identifying the fundamental philosophical foundations of Dewey's democratic humanism and revealing how they can yield unique ways of reasoning, conceiving beauty, and communicating to promote a more authentic democracy in a blend of education and politics.

The book is composed of three parts, the first of which dissects fascist antihumanism into three component factors. One factor draws from Stanley Aronowitz's concept of ragged individualism and Dewey's critiques of American rugged individualism, which together identify phenomena where individuals are through social alienation made more vulnerable to 'exploitation by economic machines' and 'artificial, fleeting, and superficial relations provided by the techniques of mass society' (23). Ragged individualism serves as potential kindling for fascism 'by creating a social order in which people feel not only helpless and alone but also resentful and superior to others' (26). To the antihumanist, the necessity for genuine communication and social relationships goes unrecognized.

Another factor is animist nationalism, the idea of 'nationalism not as a political structure but as a unifying, animating spirit' that demands dogmatic adherence (29). The culmination of this adherence is violence against groups outside the national spirit (39-44). While ragged individualism isolates, animist nationalism thus regroups the lost individuals into a mass that blindly follows a manufactured identity. The third factor of fascist antihumanism, the manipulative power of totalitarian propaganda, serves as the fuel for the process by putting vast communicative power in the hands of a few elites with the intent to inform the public as quickly as possible, but which simultaneously erodes individuals' capacity to reflect on the information (45-7). In this sense, 'propaganda masquerades as education and even as community, isolating individuals into narrowly defined groups and inoculating them against new ideas and relations' (47). To further illustrate Dewey's perspective on propaganda, Crick analyzes multiple critiques Dewey wrote in papers like the *New York Times* on the film *Mission to Moscow* in cooperation with Suzanne La Follette (49). Dewey's opposition to the film stems from its attempt to blur facts about the Soviet Union to enforce the idea that it was an ally to the United States, or in other words, creating 'a pseudopublic opinion whose function is to keep the public in darkness' (58). This connection to Dewey's work outside of conventional academia proves valuable in demonstrating the activist character of Dewey's humanist philosophy and its application to real-world phenomena.

Upon dividing fascist antihumanism into its fundamental parts, Crick outlines Dewey's democratic humanist antithesis to each. Instead of ragged individualism, focus is placed on 'individuality as constantly changing and adapting to its environment, an environment that necessarily involves being *in* and *with* an environment that is shared by others' (65). For Dewey, genuine communication between individuals is central to what it means to be human and vital to existence, a humanist argument which is unique because it is naturalist, embracing 'our intimate connection with our social, technological, and natural environment' (65-6). Language is therefore centered as 'part of nature itself and a means by which we reach deeper into its essence' (75). Dewey's envisioned result, in contrast to blind obedience to authority, is an individuality directing 'the expression of power through the technologies that give to individuals the freedom to articulate ends and choose the means to their realization' (79).

To counter animist nationalism, Dewey proposes a 'renascent liberalism' that focuses on a commitment to 'cooperation and the use of intelligent social planning to allow all people to have the resources to construct a flourishing individuality' (85). Instead of masses following the will of a sole regime or a laissez-faire economic system where individuals compete against each other, Dewey envisions a society where such individuality can be cultivated through deliberative communication with others to test one's assumptions and constructively critique existing structures (92-5). On a societal scale, Dewey views this communication as being essential to a democracy where power is shared equitably, an argument that Crick emphasizes by framing them in the context of Dewey's 1932 lecture at a meeting of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and his later wariness of nuclear weapons (96-9).

Where fascism antihumanism calls for propaganda, Dewey advocates for fostering individuals' capacities to discern symbolic meanings cooperatively (117). To illustrate these views, Crick draws from Dewey's 1934 lecture on the radio show, *University of the Air*, as well as Dewey's efforts to support public broadcasting (100-2). Crick also shows the contrast between Dewey's views and Walter Lippmann's critique of democracy that alleges the common person is not intelligent enough to provide informed political input and should merely serve the purpose of 'public approval of policies while requiring that the policies themselves will be crafted by experts' (107). Dewey offers hope against Lippmann's bleak view by stressing the need for citizen input at local levels, promoting the social sciences to allow citizens to evaluate and conceptualize policy proposals, and fostering communication channels that make intelligence building a cooperative process (111-117).

The final part of the book proposes how democratic humanism could be approached pedagogically in accordance with Dewey's vision. Crick bases this learning process on logic, which Dewey argues should promote 'experimental attitudes to meet changing conditions' (123). Dewey's basis for logical capacity is the ability to detach meanings from observations so they can be played and experimented with to create new symbolic connections, a process that hinges on language (123-136). Furthermore, a greater understanding can be reached through 'a shift in emphasis from individual creativity to cooperative discussion' (142). Dewey's process of making logical judgments is rooted in experience, since it is upon observation that something can be doubted, the problem defined, ideas generated and tested, and then a decision can be made on how to proceed in thought and action (136).

Crick points to Dewey's views on aesthetics as a way to foster such collaborative reasoning. Dewey views art as inherently communicative, thus a democratic humanist education should develop a capacity to understand and engage in dialogue with art (149-150). The communicative power of art is particularly potent because it is the culmination of past and present shared experiences built

upon by the aforementioned logical processes (169-174). Crick connects this communicative potential of art to a pedagogy of democratic humanism, since ‘if democracy is to be a reality as a communicative form of voluntary association that allows for experimental growth over time, it has to commit itself to the development of taste through the promotion of education in the arts’ (174). Crick’s point is significant because it implicitly highlights developing an understanding of art and its meanings as both a potential way to defend against the indoctrinating effects of artistic propaganda and to foster deliberative behaviours in citizens so they can improve the qualities of their democracies.

The final pedagogical pillar of democratic humanism that Crick outlines is rhetoric. While Dewey does not extensively mention rhetoric in his writings, Crick uses Dewey’s arguments against subverting peace-focused dialogues, in the first half of the twentieth century, to illustrate a connection with a sophisticated understanding of rhetoric that calls for developing a rhetorical culture, and ‘the timely art of warning and instructing free people to organize for political action through democratic institutions’ (183).

Two relatively minor additions could be made to further increase the book’s enduring scholarly relevance. One question that comes to mind is where it fits within the literature analyzing Dewey’s works. Are there any scholars who interpret Dewey’s humanism differently, and if so, how may they be refuted or reconciled? Another similar question emerges in regards to Dewey’s more contemporary interlocutors. Are there any humanist scholars who deviate significantly from Dewey’s approach, and how may Dewey’s works be understood to develop potential counters to these opposing views? Such inclusions could prove especially valuable for new generations of educators and scholars who may read Crick’s work as an introduction to Dewey’s thought and apply it to their own societal realities. Regardless, they have much to gain from reading this book.

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