

The Search for the Self: the Essence of Dewey's Ethics

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LA RICERCA DEL SÉ: L'ESSENZA DELL'ETICA DI DEWEY

ABSTRACT

This paper is divided into three brief parts and will try to clarify, in the young John Dewey, the meaning of the individual as a social organism. The individual as a social organism is considered as a «container and user» of democracy, in continuous movement and thus changeable, through: (a) the understanding of ethics, an ideal that loses value if it is separated from the spiritualistic-naturalistic conception; (b) the organic law of every individual. In fact, the subjective aspect, the intention, the inner thrust all link up with the objective aspect, the universal status, with society in all its aspects; (c) the role of social theory as a peculiar type of moral organism and as a concept of individual liberty to be understood in its positive meaning: becoming social individuals. These three aspects embody, within an educational perspective, the idea of progress that consists of the common good and common duty, thus becoming the main thread of Dewey's democratic theory. By means of pedagogical dictates Dewey will prove that, in order to become a «conscious act», the creation of a State must become the representation of the individual's essence.

Keywords: Being, Democracy, Education, Ethics, Self.

For Dewey the significant contrast is not between individual and group [...] but between individuals who are productive and creative, and therefore able to contribute to group life [...].

L. Hickman, *John Dewey's pragmatic technology*, p. 171

Despite its magnificence, the western philosophical cultural framework «pushes» humans into a state of facticity, awareness and constant struggle with antithetical elements such as nihilism and optimism, the being and the not-being, the thing and the nothing, the finished human act in continuous tension towards the infinite. Can the problem of existence bound to anguish and to the search for happiness be solved in practice? What's the role of the *Being* and of the *Nothing* – the supreme categories of classic Greek thought – in the ethical process? Does all this represent an opening or does it flow together into the eternal?

Such questions imply a reflection within the ethical-philosophical context, since humans have always been hovering between being nothing and being something; between being something concretely and the fear to become once again the nothing he fears although he does not know it. This nihilism is nothing but a *being*, i.e. something that *is* (Severino, 2006). Western history portrays a framework in which man has always tried to go beyond himself – to become something else – looking for something that leads him out of uncertain reality and that makes him more and more powerful. Aside from the scientific-technological aspect, this continuous tension of humans towards the going-beyond-himself is mainly bound to ethics. Ethics – the value it has in the democratic process – is definitely the most widely studied and analyzed aspect of western history (Severino, 2009). The interest of the individual's role, his rights, his self, liberty and the state are all matters that have walked arm in arm with Western thought (and not only) in the cultural and civil growth, especially in relationship with the search for unity. All this looks at the political conception of a form of justice which is more acceptable in terms of cooperation among citizens considered free and equal; members who at the same time form and benefit from society. Can monarchy, aristocracy or democracy embody these ideals?

The essential idea that turns Dewey's thought into one of the most important reflections of contemporary culture is the aspect of unity which is fundamental in the birth and organization of the political system that has to be understood as democratic theory first and then as democratic «constitution». This is the aspect that this *paper*, divided into three brief parts, will try to clarify by making the most of the individual as a social organism, as a «container and user» of democracy, in continuous movement and, thus, mutable through: (a) the understanding of ethics – an ideal that loses value if it is separated from the spiritualistic-naturalistic conception, from the philosophical-scientific process and from the moral; (b) the organic law of every individual, since in Dewey ethics does not follow the Hegelian distinction between ethicity and moral, but rather preserves the Aristotelian unity where habits link up with social and individual customs and where the tech-

nical aspect necessarily intersects with the philosophical one. The subjective aspect, the intention, the inner thrust all link up with the objective aspect, the universal *status*, society in all its aspects. The moral is a phenomenon of spirituality, of the self, while ethics is a dynamic-social phenomenon. So, it is obvious that Deweyan ethics cannot just be considered simply – and, therefore, banally – as a natural process, since nature does not give rise to any ideal. It has to be seen at once within the framework of the philosophical process, because ethics (as philosophy has always taught us) is a way of life in search of what is true and right (*ethics* derives from *ethos* and is *the way someone is or lives, the way man lives*). Therefore, democracy can only be understood within the philosophical process (in contrast with John Rawls's and Richard Rorty's belief. The two scholars maintained that the reasons of democracy are against the reasons of philosophy, in that democratic politics is not aimed at understanding the nature of the human being – because it transcends every single individual – but rather at safeguarding an agreement among citizens: Rorty, 1994; Rawls, 1999); (c) the role of social theory as a peculiar type of moral organism (a neo-Hegelian view of society) and as a concept of individual liberty to be understood in its positive meaning: to become social individuals (Pezzano, 2011; Westbrook, 1991). This entails the value of social efficiency through which human activity reasserts itself and allows the common sharing of values and, thus, the establishment of common values (Dewey, 1916, pp. 14-27).

These three aspects embody the idea of progress that consists in common good and common duty, thus becoming the *fil rouge* of Dewey's democratic theory that starts in his long treatise «The ethics of democracy». This 1888 work is a sharply critical not so much of the opinions expressed by Sir Henry Maine in his 1886 text on democracy *Popular government*, but rather to the means that the British jurist believed should be used to penetrate democratic nature and accomplish it (Pezzano, 2007).

1. THE DEMOCRATIC IDEAL: HETEROGENESIS OF ENDS?

I'd like to start the discussion on young Dewey's concept of ethics by citing the final words of his essay «The ethics of democracy»:

Democracy is an ethical idea, the idea of one personality, with truly infinite capacities, incorporate with every man. Democracy and the one, the ultimate, ethical ideal of humanity are to my mind synonyms. The idea of democracy, the idea of liberty, equality, and fraternity, represents a society in which the distinction between the spiritual and the secular has ceased [...]. But this, you

will say, is idealism. In reply, I can but quote James Russell Lowell once more and say that «it is indeed idealism, but that I am one of those who believe that the real will never find an irremovable basis till it rests upon the ideal»; and add that the best test of any form of society is the ideal which it proposes for the forms of its life, and the degree in which it realizes this ideal. (Dewey, 1888, pp. 248-249; Pezzano, 2010)

This reflection puts an end to a discussion that was opened with a fierce attack against anyone who considers and judges democratic government as an individualistic model that has only a numeric feature. That's why this 1888 essay has to be considered an important philosophical-pedagogical document that – although it clearly follows a political path – never abandons its philosophical pattern. It is a remarkable early work that did not receive from Dewey's critics the attention it deserved, since it was studied as a political essay or, even worse, as an essay where Dewey expresses his conclusions on democratic theory. Dewey does not end at all his speech on democracy; he rather gives life to it. He gives it a long life that will ripen in many of his subsequent writings, taking on different attitudes: sometimes «easy-going» and sometimes «critical and disdainful».

Dewey's democratic theory, and its evolution within pedagogy, is generally mentioned with reference to his 1916 work «Democracy and education». But the birth of John Dewey's democratic and educational theory does not occur in that important work, because he was questioning himself about the deep meanings of democratic value with respect to human action several years before; precisely in this 1888 writing which is of fundamental importance for the correct interpretative analysis of «Democracy and education». The later work develops themes mentioned in the 1888 essay and applies them to the educational context. But it is in «The ethics of democracy» that the young philosopher questions himself about the individual's organic concept through the ethic ideal of humanity. Dewey believes that here the «knower» plays a fundamental and active role against the passivity of the firm world – fulfilled in itself – that would turn the act of knowing into a copy of the universe.

Action, along with the act of knowing and the intellect, is one of the main requirements both of the individual and, in the specific case, of Dewey's democratic ideal built on a double basis in this 1888 essay. It is generated along two paths that appear to be parallel and non-complimentary but that in reality could be the key to the interpretation of Dewey's democratic theory: (a) the existence of a clear applicative difficulty of democratic theory, i.e. of the relationship between theoretical criticism and the practice of democracy. A contraposition between idealists and realists; in other words, a sort of dyad that prevents democracy from putting into practice its ideals and from abandoning the formal aspect in favor of the participative social role; (b) the

assertion that the universal is the total accomplishment of the individual in virtue of the interests of the social organism, i.e. of society.

Based on these two aspects as well as on the Platonic and Aristotelian treatments of the democratic ideal, the discussion first refutes some aspects of Maine's thought and then proposes a whole set of democratic theoretical analyses that range from James Russell Lowell's political theory to the «social contract» theory; from Hobbes's natural right to the processing of some theoretical knots existing in radicalism; and from the analytical and consequentialist wake of Bentham (who believed that the principles of good government were tied to universal laws governing human nature) to Austin's juridical positivism, (Hickman, 2000, ch. 7).

It is this synthesis of different thoughts that show to the reader how interested the young Dewey was in the problems of human nature and actions, and that allow a comparison between the different elements of democratic and aristocratic theory, pointing out the limits of Maine's theory that created quite a confusion by refuting any historical meaning of democratic government. This confusion is generated from the very moment at which Maine asserts that democracy is the «only form of government» and then discusses it only partially by focusing the attention only on the simple «meaning» of the word «government» and on the relationship of superiority, i.e. between subject and sovereignty.

Dewey considers such a position criticizable because of this reason alone, but the issue gets even more complicated, especially when it is clear what Maine aims at: viz, to justify democracy as mass government based on the «quantitative or numeric factor» (a constant problem of Maine's entire essay and a fiercely criticized aspect in Dewey's «The ethics of democracy»). This factor shows the two sides of the coin: on one side democracy appears as the «sovereignty of many» whose value is fragmented and, thus, cancelled along with any power. On the other side, aristocracy and monarchy maintain the power since they arise from the absolute power of one or few.

Dewey believes that this is an extremely simplistic and reductive vision of democracy and, especially of the citizen's ethics and the individual's morality. Democracy is not a matter of numbers; it is an issue of «education» and «action».

If we analyze Maine's theory, we find that every citizen would have the same share of power, thus canceling any hierarchy, i.e. any form of command, as well as any form of order, because anarchy would be generated. Will is no longer collective, but individual, and it would not be possible to think about common good, but just about the individual's good. The only consent possible in such a situation is that produced by manipulation or corruption, irrational, immoral and highly unstable.

This is an absolutely antidemocratic vision that gives rise to regimes such as monarchy and aristocracy, which prevent any improvement of society and state because it does not take into account ethical values and also underestimates the resolution of the tension between the individual and the universal that enables the individual to fulfill himself within society.

Democracy would therefore be such a conglomeration of unities that it would be the most difficult form of government since: the «common will» would be cancelled because it can only exist when few men are involved and not the entire mass. And since the government is generally based on an act of will, democracy could not even exist as a form of government because common will is absent. There is yet another paradox: in order to exist, democracy has to rest on the basis of a fictitious government with a fictitious will. How? Through the establishment of parties and corruption.

Maine's democratic vision is highly unstable, fragile and problematic. It therefore becomes antidemocratic with some criteria – especially the numeric one – that are not sufficiently developed and assessed *in toto*. That is exactly why Dewey decides to dwell upon this aspect, to develop all those parts that Maine has not taken (voluntarily or involuntarily) into consideration, and to provide an explanation of the possible «primary and fortuitous» or «secondary and derived» origin of the numeric factor. In doing so, it would be possible to understand: (a) the nature of sovereignty; (b) the relationship between government and state; (c) the democracy as a form of government.

Maine appears as a sophist rather than a Platonic-Aristotelian intellectual. He preaches equity, but seems to be fostering the mistaken idea that the stronger is always the winner. Dewey believes that Maine would have had a different vision if he had not mistakenly interpreted Plato's thought by concealing in his political theory the value of «reason» linked to the laws. Also problematic is his interpretation of Aristotle's thought about the sorting of sciences into theoretical, practical and poetical, and about the importance of education in accordance with the law. Understood properly these three above-mentioned points would have led him to a different vision. The Stagiritae speaks about a «numeric sign» and applies it to the context of classification (Aristotle, 2002), whereas Maine, Dewey thinks, omits just the core of Aristotle's political speech, the foundation of the State, i.e. the constitution, the organic law, and only turns his attention to a partial application of the numeric *modus*, so as to generate an antidemocratic speech.

2. THE NUMERIC MAJORITY AND THE «SOCIAL CONTRACT»

Dewey's criticism of Maine insists, remarkably, on the wrong use of numeric aggregation related to a contradiction as regards the «social contract». By means of this agreement human beings abandon their condition of precariousness and violence (caused by the total absence of laws) in view of common utility. This passage occurs by means of a contract that gives the ruler the power to impose, even with the force, social order and, thus, a harmonious living-together.

Dewey simply wants to probe the key passage of the «social contract» theory: the passage from individualistic condition to social state, in which humans are presented not as a numeric aggregate but rather as «social organisms» that live in a relationship. *Seeing humans as a social organism and not as mass will lead to the right explanation of the essence of democracy.*

The individual as a numeric aggregation can only be an asocial man, a subject that suffers and acts with no rule, who does not have the common will and who, therefore, has no intent to cure him or herself. A human, thus, lacking any quality: is «abstract».

Dewey's criticisms have a twofold value because they: (a) clarify why Maine came to an antidemocratic conclusion after starting off from an appraisal of democracy as the only possible form of government; and (b) provide further explanations of Dewey's concept of society. The doubtful assertion that any individual represents society strengthens the ethics-religion relationship existing in Dewey's thought. But such union is denied by Maine's theory that completely lacks both the religious and the ethical expression that make the citizen free and not bound to express his volition.

Human society represents the most perfect organism. Everything really lives inside each of its members, and there is no longer any appearance of physical aggregation or continuity. The organism expresses itself as it is: an ideal or spiritual life, a unity of will. Thus, if society and the individual are really organic towards each another, then the individual is a concentrated society.

The moral and spiritual union is the only one able to carry out the function of an eternal reality, in that it converts the aristocracy into democracy:

Democracy, like any other policy, has been defined magnificently as the memory of an historical past, the awareness of a live present, the ideal of the future to come. Democracy, in one word, is the social conception, i.e. ethics, and its meaning as a government rests exactly on this ethical meaning. Democracy is a form of government only because it is a form of moral and spiritual association. (Dewey, 1888, p. 240)

No-one can clarify this aspect better than Plato, as in the idea of democracy contained in his *Republic* where he talks about the union between the spir-

itual and the ethical. The words of the Greek philosopher are particularly true because it is in the state, and only in the state, that the individual can carry out his potential, i.e. become what he really is. And as the member of a spiritual organism (the State), the individual, in losing his own individual will, acquires a wider reality. But this does not correspond to the loss of the self or of his personality, but rather to his own fulfillment. The individual is not sacrificed, but brought to reality within the State.

We cannot find any base on which to distinguish between the aristocratic and the democratic ideal. But we haven't asked ourselves yet how to accomplish this unity between the individual and the universal, this perfect man within the perfect state. And here is the distinction we were looking for: the difference is not the end, but the means. Plato (and any other expression of aristocratic life) thought that the multitude is unable to think of such an ideal, and even less to reach it. The Greek philosopher is the real author of the doctrine of the «few», also known as the «wise», to whom the absolute power has to be given, because they are the only ones capable of harmonizing the State thanks to the inborn skills to lead every single citizen towards his right function.

Democracy does not differ from aristocracy because of its end, but because of its means. What really matters is personal responsibility and individual initiative. It's definitely not fortuitous that Dewey referred to Plato's thought; for the latter, the state is seen as an ethical ideal, i.e. the fulfillment of the individual through society. Dewey's ideal already exists and works within the individual; it is an ideal that recognizes in itself liberty, responsibility and the initiative for ethics. The question that troubled Plato's and Aristotle's minds (as well as the minds of many other philosophers) is the same that comes back to life with Dewey, since he believes that democracy must take into account the *personality* as the first and last reality.

Dewey's functional research methodology makes the most of the interconnection between the individual and the law, and insists on the importance of equality, both ethical and economic, as it is the source of fear of aristocrats. A democracy that is capable of healing the unity of organism and relationship. A relationship that always pays close attention to reality and frees from its initial abstraction the idea of the universal within the individual. (Dewey will develop this aspect in his 1887 work *Psychology*; here he will insist on the importance of the idea of sharing, and he will also provide a condition *sine qua non* to overcome the mistaken ideal conceptions that alienate man and that prevent him from achieving absolute truth, i.e. the possibility to accept universal aspects within its own «I» and to rebuilt an organic society, thus restoring the real role of democracy).

The idea of democracy and the ideas of liberty, equality and fraternity all represent a society in which the distinction between the spiritual and the profane has ceased. Just as the Church and the State, i.e. the divine and human organization in society, are considered as one in the Greek and Christian theory of the Reign of God [...], so the democracy is closer to the ideal and social organization in which the individual and society are organic to one another. That's why democracy, as long as it really is a democracy, is the most stable and not the most unsafe form of government. In any other form of government there are individuals who are not organs of common will, who are outside the society they live in and who are, actually, aliens to what should be our republic. (Dewey, 1888, pp. 248-249)

Dewey's belief that the individual is the State becomes such a vital element in his research, that he starts speaking about collective goods and common resources, thus proving that economy is a human product, as there cannot be any abstract form of identity of aims and identity of interests. Unfortunately, pre-Christian thought is tied up by intellectual limits, so it is necessary to save it by using material goods as means through which a better life can be obtained; thanks to this, humans will leave their state of solitude and start building human relationships.

3. DEMOCRACY AS A FORM OF COMMON WILL GOVERNMENT

Let's try to analyze the following syllogism: society is described as an organic thing and its actual member is the citizen. Since society represents organicity, i.e. the result of intelligence, it is obvious that the individual is both the holder and user of such organicity and intelligence, as well as of its will. The conclusion is that the citizen possesses sovereignty. And it is not possible to pretend that this does not exist, i.e. that society is one thing and its member another, because society exists just in virtue of its members. Dewey believes that if we follow this thought consistently we will reach an universal result that classifies democracy as a government professing «communion» and not disunion and chaos, i.e. that does not threaten the unity of the social organism but rather generates it – contrary to any other form of government – and that places «will» at the core of everything. This latter aspect is of remarkable importance, because it can only be present in the democratic function so as to make us define democracy as the most stable and not as the most unsafe of all governments. Dewey believes that Maine's biggest disadvantage is to have analyzed democracy only in instrumental terms, looking at it as the most effective form of government to organize consensus and preserve stability.

Analytical abstraction impoverishes humans, in that it takes their qualities away from them and considers them just as numbers, i.e. «votes». It seems that will exists in the act of voting, but Dewey believes that is untrue, because the majority would impose its own will but not the will of others. As stated above, democracy does not only prove that *personality* is the first and final reality, but it also demonstrates that liberty is the opportunity to show to all the «individual essence as a social being». This is the key to Dewey's ethics – metaphorized into the «function» – which indicates an active relationship between individuals and environment with the specific aim of generating wellbeing both for oneself and for the entire community.

Mathematical and physical sciences have weakened such democratic essence and have strengthened the numeric type conception, i.e. the abstract type conception (Carlyle is an example). Tylden saw democracy only as a mechanism to keep the government alive, where (and this is a rather interesting aspect) there is actually no minority, as the latter is nothing but the meeting and union point of the two (apparently) opposing parties: «[...] in shaping the politics that emerges from the conflict, the minority just acts as a slightly less important part of the majority» (Tilden, 1885, Vol. I, p. 290).

The moral end Dewey asserted in *Outlines of a critical theory of ethics* (1891) was to explain that a person's specific function appears clearly only in the very moment he acts, i.e. when he turns theory into function, thus fulfilling his own personality through the right communication like the *inputs* offered by the environment (i.e. when he proves that the environment is not the only active subject, but also the individual who reacts to stimuli) for his own wellbeing and the wellbeing of others. That is exactly the core of the matter: Dewey believes that the relationship between individual skills and the environment is a *mutual* encounter and not a matter of unambiguous settlement of individual needs and of the powers within an established environment. To position oneself into a particular environment may also mean changing it through a self-fulfillment process that in the case of Dewey legitimated a social reform.

On one hand, there is interaction, i.e. the action carried out by individuals *with* and *within* the environment, on the other hand there is a fundamental element in Dewey's speech: liberty. Such liberty obviously consists in carrying out everyone's functions and in the search of a common end by all individuals; i.e. an ethics of self-accomplishment of positive liberty that arises and takes roots in Dewey's social philosophy.

The really moral human is absolutely interested in the wellbeing of others – such an interest is essential for the accomplishment of one's self and turns others into independent objects of a charitable benevolence. Showing one's real interest in others means to take action in order to create conditions

that give pleasure to other's identity, thus ensuring the conditions necessary for a free action and not a forced action to the point of turning them into slaves.

For this reason Dewey proposed a sort of list of «cardinal virtues» essential to liberty: wisdom (the practical judgement), temperance (self-control), courage and justice (Dewey, 1894, p. 353), and insisted that the seat of liberty was only in virtuous action.

In 1894 he asserted that the substance of democratic politics was in the effort to create the conditions for the self-fulfillment of all individuals of a society. Ethical theory was practically absurd if it did not provide a political impulse aimed at ensuring the fundamentals of moral life. In the last part of his essay «The ethics of democracy», Dewey mentions an aspect that may appear unrelated, but which is inherent to the concept of society and that must go arm in arm with the concept of equality: the industrial value of the ethical path. That is because the right thing to do is to consider all industrial relationships as subordinated to human relationships, and to make sure the former take on a priority role as social function. Industrial democracy means that any industrial relationship has to be considered as subordinated to human relationships, i.e. to the law of personality, and that the divisions into classes of industrial capitalism are incompatible with the ethics of democracy. Dewey asserts that the division of labor in industrial capitalism leaves much to be desired in comparison with an ideal division of labor that enables every individual to perform his functions thus becoming an active citizen: *the imperfect fulfillment of the individual implies the imperfect fulfillment of everything else and vice-versa. Class interests do not impose only a limit on the individual, but also a limit on everything else.*

This assertion leads us to the end of this essay, whose conclusion is the reply to what was said in the beginning *democracy is an ethical idea, the idea of personality with endless possibilities embodied in every human*: democracy is an embryo inside every individual and that is confirmed by the structure of all other existing forms of government (though involuntarily), because the aristocratic and democratic classes – although they assert that the existence of the State is fundamental to achieving the ethical end – have a totally and remarkably opposed vision: aristocracy believes that this ethical end is a target that must only be achieved through institutions or organizations, whereas democracy asserts that such ideal is implicit in the personality of every individual and that society must help and wait for such ideal to mature.

Dewey believes that liberty, equality and fraternity are the pillars of a real government that can only be found in democracy, as opposed to aristocracy, which is pure blasphemy against personality. The real government has to be able to orient the democratic potential embodied by every single

individual (who is a potential citizen from his very birth), by controlling his growth and unpredictability (Spadafora, 2006). In the wake of Plato, Dewey entrusts the State with the moral responsibility of educating the individual to becoming; a continuous becoming that modifies the being and that «forces» democracy to a continuous state of motion and, sometimes, to a state of abstraction that makes its application difficult to the point that today it seems to be overwhelmed by the science and *techne* that guide our actions and direct our expectations. The solution to this process delineates the identity of ethics, moral, democracy and education in John Dewey: a government that is right and ready to accept these natural differences of individuals and to turn them into «common wills» rather than into elements of disorder and violence is the only government that can be said to be democratic. This is a far from simple process because of the very complexity of the individual who lives in continuous change, adaptation and re-adaptation, thus making the fulfillment of his identity quite complex and, as a consequence, also the accomplishment of the democratic State. Education carries out the «*maieutics*» task of the individual's *becoming*, and, as a consequence, of the democratic society's *becoming* (Baldacci, 2006). This task originates between the lines of this 1888 essay and will be analyzed thoroughly in the 1916 work «Democracy and education».

Reflection on the role of the individual, who turns from potential citizen into active citizen, i.e. supporter of the State, is the fundamental principle in Dewey's theory, which takes root in Platonic-Aristotelian philosophy that analyzes the concept of the State, its origin, the concept of the individual and of the politician by using education as the orientating criterion of the action *in virtue of*, respecting its duties and considering society as the only place where aptitudes can be developed (Plato), and repressing ferocity and violence (Aristotle) through the knowledge of what is right and good and what is wrong and harmful (Platone, 2004; Aristotele, 2002).

By means of pedagogical dictates Dewey will prove that, in order to become a «conscious act», the creation of a State must become the representation of the individual's essence.

Basically Dewey considers democracy as a new concept of subjectivity that could identify itself politically with the «new individualism» [...], i.e. a social individual open to alterity, but also thoughtful with the complete development of human personality, i.e. with the recovery of that dimension of the development of subjectivity that discovers the subject's vocations and potential, and that clarifies the unexpressed *embedded powers* that the individual has to express in social reality. (Spadafora, 2003)

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RIASSUNTO

Questo contributo, diviso in tre parti, tenterà di chiarire nel giovane Dewey il significato dell'individuo inteso come un organismo sociale. L'individuo, come un organismo sociale, è considerato come «contenitore e fruitore» della democrazia, sempre in movimento, dunque, mutevole, attraverso: (a) la comprensione dell'etica, un ideale che perde valore se scisso dalla concezione spiritualistico-naturalistica; (b) la legge organica di ciascun individuo. Infatti, l'aspetto soggettivo, l'intenzione, la spinta interiore si legano a quello oggettivo, allo status universale, alla società in tutti i suoi aspetti; (c) infine, il ruolo della teoria sociale come un tipo peculiare di organismo morale e come concetto di libertà individuale da intendere nella sua accezione positiva: divenire individui sociali. Questi tre aspetti, nell'ambito di una prospettiva educativa, incarnano l'idea di progresso che consiste nel bene comune e nel dovere comune, divenendo il «fil rouge» della teoria democratica deweyana. Dal punto di vista pedagogico Dewey dimostra che al fine di divenire un atto consapevole, la creazione di uno Stato deve divenire la rappresentazione dell'essenza dell'individuo.

Parole chiave: Democrazia, Educazione, Etica, Essere, Sé.