

Deliberative Democracy as a Matter of Public Spirit: Reconstructing the Dewey-Lippmann Debate

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Winston Churchill voiced the felt, but unexpressed, emotions of his times, as exceptional politicians and demagogues so skilfully do. He remarked that,

Democracy is the worst system devised by wit of man, except for all the others.¹

And,

The best argument against democracy is a five-minute conversation with the average voter.²

In his pithy indictments of democracy, Churchill captured a feeling prevalent among intellectuals in the first half of the twentieth century; a feeling that government-by-the-people warranted, at best, a limited or half-hearted faith; a feeling that might be described as the “majoritarian creed.” This creed can be characterized by the following propositions. A believer-in-the-democratic-faith defends majoritarian methods—such as popular votes, polls and representation—as the best available means to signal the people’s collective political preferences.

¹ Winston Churchill, *The Quotable Churchill: A Prime Collection of Wit and Wisdom*, Oxted (Surrey), England: Running Press, 1998. This is the shorter, more easily quotable version of a longer statement attributed to Churchill in the House of Commons, November 11, 1947: “Many forms of government have been tried, and will be tried in this world of sin and woe. No one pretends that democracy is perfect or all-wise. Indeed, it has been said that democracy is the worst form of Government except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time.”

² Ibid.

Yet, in the same breath, he tempers his faith with scepticism. Specifically, he doubts that the typical citizen-voter has the time, the desire or the capacity to intelligently deliberate about the consequences of his voting-decisions.

Twenty years prior to Churchill’s sceptical remarks, a debate over the primacy of popular deliberation in a democracy had already transpired. It occurred in two books, *Public Opinion* and *The Phantom Public*, written by the journalist and public intellectual Walter Lippmann, as well as two reviews of the aforementioned books and one book, *The Public and Its Problems*, authored by the pragmatist philosopher John Dewey.³ Commentators have seen these works as pitting Dewey against Lippmann, and some have argued that Lippmann got the better of it and some that Dewey did.⁴ In the

³ W. Lippmann, *Phantom Public* (New York: Harcourt, 1925). Id., *Public Opinion* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1945). J. Dewey, “Public Opinion,” reprinted in J.A. Boydston and K.E. Paulos, eds. *Middle Works of John Dewey*, vol. 13 (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987), pp. 337-345. Id., “Practical Democracy: *The Phantom Public* by Walter Lippmann,” reprinted in J.A. Boydston and K.E. Paulos, eds. *Later Works of John Dewey*, vol. 13 (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987). Id., *The Public and Its Problems* (New York: Holt, 1927).

⁴ Robert Westbrook, for instance, thinks that Lippmann won the debate. See “Doing Dewey: An Autobiographical Fragment,” *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, vol. 29, no. 4 (Fall 1993): 493-511, 505-6. Id., *John Dewey and American Democracy* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991), pp.

first section of the paper, I set forth my negative thesis, namely, that the contemporary commentators grossly misinterpret the debate. Instead of occurring between Lippmann and Dewey, the debate took place between Lippmann and a breed of American Progressives who embraced the majoritarian creed. In the second section, I propose and defend the paper's positive thesis, namely, that Dewey employs a concept called *public-spiritedness* to effectively mediate the conflict between the debate's actual combatants. Not only does this concept help to resolve the debate, it also anticipates the contemporary notion of deliberative democracy. Or so I will argue.

1.

Commentators on the Dewey-Lippmann debate have split over who deserved the final victory. Dewey's most recent biographer, Robert Westbrook, sides with Lippmann. He reluctantly admits that he "could not avoid the conclusion . . . that Lippmann had the better of Dewey in their debate in the 1920s on the implications of the eclipse of citizenship and the collapse of public life in the United States."⁵ The most vocal defenders of the view that Dewey triumphed in the debate are Michael Eldridge and Raymond Boisvert.⁶

306-318. Alan Ryan also seems to be in this camp. See *John Dewey and the High Tide of American Liberalism* (New York and London: W.W. Norton and Co., 1995). Michael Eldridge favours Dewey as the debate's victor. See "Dewey's Faith in Democracy as Shared Experience," *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, vol. 32, no. 1 (Winter 1996): 11-30, 16-17. Raymond Boisvert joins him. See *Rethinking Our Time* (New York: State University of New York, 1998), pp. 75-77.

⁵ R. Westbrook, "Doing Dewey: An Autobiographical Fragment," p. 505.

⁶ M. Eldridge, "Dewey's Faith in Democracy as Shared Experience," *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, vol. 32, no. 1 (Winter 1996): 11-30, 16-17. R. Boisvert, *Rethinking Our Time* (New York: State University of New York, 1998), pp. 75-77.

However, the commentators have misconstrued the debate's construction and dynamic. Construction-wise, the debate occurred not between Lippmann and Dewey, but instead between Lippmann and American Progressives committed to the majoritarian creed. Dynamic-wise, the debate took place amidst a unique set of historical circumstances, in the mid to late 1920s, when the rise of America's third political party, the Progressives, had already reached its zenith, the halcyon days of American Progressivism, and had begun a spiralling decline. Members of the Party had been graced with an inspired leadership, including Teddy Roosevelt and Robert LaFollette, but had suffered repeated election defeats. At local and national elections, Progressive political candidates pushed innovative domestic reforms, but unfortunately, with the advent of the First World War, popular interest shifted from domestic to foreign affairs. As a result, the Progressives' optimism about achieving the "public good" or "common interest" had become soured by an inhospitable turn of historical events.⁷ Many of the Progressives teetered on the brink of defection. The time was therefore adventitious for a change of political philosophy, and Lippmann, who was himself a disillusioned Progressive, stood ready to convert them to his own.

To do so, Lippmann aimed at a specific weakness in their majoritarian creed, namely, their scepticism about the wisdom of popular deliberation. Thus, in *Public Opinion*, Lippmann claimed that citizens of real-world democracies lack the time, the capacity, the interest and the knowledge to

⁷ Peter Levine states that, "practically all self-described progressives shared at least one commitment. They believed that there was a "national interest" or "public good," superior to special interests and market outcomes. *The New Progressive Era: Toward a Fair and Deliberative Democracy* (New York and Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000), p. 18.

deliberate effectively about their voting choices. In a revealing passage, he critically assesses the average voter's time and capacity for informed judgement:

Of those who can both read and understand, a good three-quarters we may assume have some part of half an hour a day to spare for the subject. To them the words so acquired [by listening to the rhetoric of their leaders] are the cue for a whole train of ideas on which ultimately a vote of untold consequences may be based. Necessarily the ideas which we allow the words we read to evoke form the biggest part of the original data of our opinions.⁸

If popular opinion is indeed generated by the free association of words, images and ideas, then majoritarian procedures that measure this opinion merely record them. These associations, which Lippmann calls "stereotypes" or "pictures in our heads," distort the real political environment and make sound political judgments by majorities impossible.⁹

Citizens of real democracies live in what Lippmann calls a "pseudo-environment" influenced by arbitrarily acquired stereotypes, not purposeful intelligence, about the world-at-large. Whereas traditional democratic theory, inspired by Aristotle, assumes that citizens are "omnicompetent," and thus equipped by "natural endowment" for self-government, the actual practice of democracy, Lippmann contends, proves otherwise.¹⁰ The experiential knowledge that any one person can accumulate about the modern world is instead extremely limited. Distorting stereotypes, sub-standard information from news media and pressing time constraints prevent informed

judgment. So, while majoritarian methods might prove effective at measuring citizens' preferences, those preferences, left to develop on their own, do not reflect an accurate, or even an intelligible, record of the political landscape. Aristotle's conception of the citizen as a "political animal" cannot be realized in the modern nation-state; it is a disappointing myth.

To achieve accuracy and intelligence in surveying the political landscape, the public requires at least two sets of political actors, leaders and experts. Experts record information and coordinate research about the environment, thereby "making the invisible visible."¹¹ Leaders make and execute policies based on the findings of experts. Together, Lippmann contends, these elites, rather than the citizens, of a democracy effectively administer the government's affairs. To preserve popular support for government policies and leadership, elites must also "manufacture consent," or produce propaganda that manipulates the popular stereotypes in the minds of citizens.¹²

While Lippmann reserves some hope that civic education might eventually eradicate "the enormous censoring, stereotyping, and dramatizing apparatus," education *per se* cannot improve the capacities of citizens to deliberate "where the environment is as obscure to the analyst as to his pupil."¹³ In *The Phantom Public*, Lippmann's successor book to *Public Opinion*, he presses this attack on education even further. He accuses all democratic theories of unduly relying on education

⁸ W. Lippmann, *Public Opinion*, p. 68.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 379.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 383.

¹² While the expression "manufacture of consent" has since become popularized by Naom Chomsky, it was originally employed by Lippmann in his essay, "Journalism and the Higher Law," (1919) re-printed in *Liberty and the News* (New Brunswick and London: Transaction, 1995), p. 8. W. Lippmann, *Public Opinion*, pp. 132-3.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 407-8.

to improve the citizen-voter's capacity to deliberate.¹⁴ The purpose of Lippmann's attack is clear. He wishes to anticipate the objection of a Progressive educational reformer, namely, that even if majoritarian procedures, at the present time, record nothing more than collective irrationality, in the future and with sufficient citizen instruction, these procedures will come to signal an informed public's preferences. Despite such speculative optimism, education alone, Lippmann claims, cannot raze the epistemological barriers of the citizen's pseudo-environment; only experts can.

Overcoming these limiting environmental factors demands what Lippmann calls "intelligence work."¹⁵ To provide the factual knowledge necessary for leaders to make informed decisions, a working democracy requires an enormous bureaucracy of intelligence divisions, supporting the various agencies of government and staffed by social scientists. In this scheme of research and record, little room is left for deliberation by the average citizen. He is always the outsider and spectator because he "has neither time, nor attention, nor interest, nor the equipment for specific judgment."¹⁶ Thus, Lippmann concludes in *Public Opinion*, "it is on the men inside, working under conditions that are sound, that the daily administrations of society must rest."¹⁷

In *The Phantom Public*, Lippmann arrives at more strikingly nihilistic conclusions than in *Public Opinion*. Not only is the entity termed a "public" in democratic theory ultimately a fiction or "phantom," its claimed members also lack a privileged epistemology, such as the scientific method or a common will, with which to liberate themselves from the

chains of their pseudo-environment.¹⁸ In addition, Lippmann provides a negligible account of the citizen's role in a democracy, one circumscribed even more heavily by the authority of elites. At regular intervals, citizens of a democracy intervene to select those who should be the Ins, or the elites in power, and to sound the alarm when elites break the rules and seek to advance private interests.¹⁹ Since elections represent a kind of sublimated, or mock, battle, the ritualistic trip to the voting booths serves to reduce the conflict between elites, but never to uplift or edify the citizen-voter. In the end, Lippmann hoped that Progressive democrats would acknowledge this dismal reality, abandon their majoritarian creed and, in their final act of conversion, substitute for it a newfound faith in the sagacity of elites.

Particularly prominent among the Old-guard Progressives who embraced the majoritarian creed was the American jurist Learned Hand, to whom Lippmann decided to dedicate his book *Phantom Public*. The dedication was itself symbolic of Lippmann's desire to sway Hand to his views. Lippmann was the target of the same desire in his former instructor at Harvard, Graham Wallas, who sought to convince him that the environment of modern life was so complicated as to be inscrutable to all but the very few. Indeed, what Lippmann's mature elitist views, and especially his notion of a pseudo-environment, bear out is that Wallas did successfully convert the young Lippmann in a book he dedicated to his former student, called *The Great Society*.²⁰ To persuade Hand and his Progressive ilk, as Wallas had done to Lippmann sixteen years earlier, Lippmann had to do more than simply

¹⁴ Id., *The Phantom Public*, pp. 22-3, 27.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Id., *Public Opinion*, p. 400.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Id., *The Phantom Public*, pp. 162-163

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 126-129.

²⁰ Ronald Steel, *Walter Lippmann and the American Century* (Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown and Co., 1980), pp. 26-28.

dedicate a book. He had to attack and exploit the vulnerable underbelly in their majoritarian creed.

However, if the case of Learned Hand is taken as representative, then Lippmann's efforts at converting the Progressives utterly failed. It is easy to overlook Hand's resistance to Lippmann's brand of elitism in *The Phantom Public*, and conclude that the American jurist was an easy convert. For one, Hand accepted the dedication and, two, if his silence is interpreted as assent, he implicitly agreed with the book's themes and arguments. Moreover, in their correspondence, Hand sympathized with Lippmann's concern in *Public Opinion* that environmental and psychological demands placed on the public severely undermine the process of popular deliberation.²¹ Yet Hand's biographer, Gerald Gunther, infers the opposite conclusion, namely that, "Hand must have read the book with very mixed, often disappointed emotions. He never wrote to Lippmann about it; unlike *Public Opinion*, it elicited no superlatives from him."²² Neither *Public Opinion* nor *The Phantom Public* could topple Hand and his fellow Progressives' faith that citizens should direct the affairs of government through majoritarian political processes.

Gunther's conclusion that Hand was not converted by Lippmann's arguments in *The Phantom Public* proves more persuasive in light of Hand's conviction, shared with other Progressives, that some powers integral to self-government cannot be delegated to leaders and experts. For instance, in the *Masses* decision, Judge Hand affirmed the right of citizens to freely discuss and decide what government policies and practices should be tolerated, on the ground that "public opinion . . . is the final source of government in a democratic

state."²³ Years later in the Holmes Lectures at Harvard, Hand would declare that,

For myself it would be irksome to be ruled by a bevy of Platonic Guardians, even if I knew how to choose them, which I assuredly do not. If they were in charge I should miss the stimulus of living in a society where I have, at least theoretically, some part in public affairs.²⁴

Among the Progressives who embraced the majoritarian creed, Hand could not have made a firmer denunciation of Lippmann's democratic elitism, and a more resounding battle cry in favour of the majoritarian creed. In the end, Lippmann's effort to exploit the Achilles' heel in the Progressives' creed, that is, their scepticism about the wisdom of mass deliberation, did not achieve the widespread conversion planned.

2.

Dewey's role in the debate between Lippmann and the Progressives was not in the capacity of a combatant. Instead, and *apropos* of the positive thesis of this paper, Dewey navigates a safe course between two flawed alternatives: on the one hand, the Progressive or majoritarian way, which defends majoritarian procedures as the best indicator of the public's preferences and, on the other, the Lippmann or elitist way,

²³ Hand states, "Words are not only the keys of persuasion, but the triggers of action, and those which have no purport but to counsel the violation of law cannot by any latitude of interpretation be a part of the public opinion which is the final source of government in a democratic state." *Masses Publishing Co. v. Patten*, 244 Fed. 535 (S.D.N.Y.1917). See Vincent Blasi, "Learned Hand and the Self-government Theory of the First Amendment: *Masses Publishing Co. v. Patten*," *University of Colorado Law Review*, vol. 61, no. 1 (1989): 1-37.

²⁴ Learned Hand, *The Bill of Rights* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958), p. 73.

²¹ Gerald Gunther, *Learned Hand: The Man and the Judge* (New York: Knopf, 1994), pp. 383-384.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 385.

which disregards public preferences and entrusts policy decisions to the exclusive judgment of elites. Dewey accomplishes this feat by proposing a third way—in the form of a mediating concept known as *public-spiritedness*—which effectively resolves the conflict between majoritarianism and elitism and, in so doing, anticipates the contemporary notion of deliberative democracy.

Commentators mistakenly characterize Dewey's reviews of Lippmann's two books as the first engagement and Dewey's *The Public and Its Problems* as the final battle in their debate over the role of citizens in a democracy. Upon reading the two reviews, one is immediately struck not only with the level of civility—which was common of Dewey—but with the high praise that the author lavishes on both of Lippmann's works. Calling *Public Opinion* "the most effective indictment of democracy as currently conceived ever penned" and *The Phantom Public* a "contribution [that] is constructive" fails to suggest a real controversy between Dewey and Lippmann. In *The Public and Its Problems*, it is likewise the case that Dewey does not immediately militate against Lippmann's position, but agrees with many of his early assessments.²⁵

One of Dewey's biographers, Alan Ryan, laments that the "difficulty for readers of *The Public and Its Problems* . . . is that Dewey accepted most of Lippmann's complaints against the existing order of things."²⁶ Indeed, while Dewey conceded many points to Lippmann, he did the same to the Progressives who embraced the majoritarian creed. And, by the same token,

he had much to criticize about both positions in his effort to harmonize their conflicting theses. While Ryan's observation that "Dewey accepted most of Lippmann's complaints" is a fair comment, it only poses a challenge to the reader if the debate is understood as between Dewey and Lippmann. Appreciated, as it should be, that is, as between Lippmann and American Progressives allied to the majoritarian creed, the reader comprehends Dewey's role in the debate as that of a mediator, not as a combatant.

As all proficient mediators do, he must first acknowledge the strengths of both combatants' positions. First, to Lippmann, Dewey echoes his criticism that the abstract theory and the actual practice of democracy admit of increasing disparity.²⁷ Likewise, Dewey acknowledges the tendency of modern society to become an ever more complex bureaucracy, for public officials to "employ their panoply to advance private and class interests" and for citizens to eschew sound judgment and gravitate towards charismatic leaders.²⁸ In similar vain as Lippmann, he also recognizes the power of propagandists to manipulate public opinion by "enlisting upon their side the inertia, prejudices and emotional partisanship of the masses."²⁹ But, most revealing of all, and more than likely the impetus for Ryan's remark that Dewey gave way to Lippmann's prognosis for the then-current state of society, Dewey declares that "the democratic public is still largely inchoate and unorganized."³⁰ Then, switching to the Progressives, Dewey hails the importance of an essential majoritarian method for signalling popular political preferences, namely, elected representation. Given Dewey's definition of the "public," that is, as "all those

²⁵ In a footnote, Dewey tells of his debt to Lippmann, stating that "To this [*Phantom Public*] as well as his *Public Opinion*, I acknowledge my indebtedness, not only to this particular point, but for ideas involved in my entire discussion even when it reaches conclusions diverging from his." J. Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, pp. 116-117, fn 1.

²⁶ A. Ryan, *John Dewey and the High Tide of American Liberalism*, p. 217.

²⁷ J. Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, pp. 94-95, 157-158.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 61, 79, 81.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 169.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

affected by the indirect consequences of transactions," those groups *qua* publics must be empowered to select "representatives of . . . [their] interests, created by these perceived consequences and to define the functions which they shall possess and employ."³¹ In addition, given Dewey's definition of the "state," that is, as "the organization of the public effected through officials," representatives become the caretakers for their constituent publics, as well as initiators of state-sponsored social experiments.³² Thus, Dewey affirms both the value of representation and social reform to those Progressives who embrace the majoritarian creed.

Besides citing the strengths of both positions, Dewey also critically examines their respective assumptions. In *Public Opinion*, Lippmann reveals his epistemological assumptions from the outset with an extensive passage quoted from Book VII of the *Republic*, Plato's well-known allegory of the cave. From this passage and his developed notion of a pseudo-environment, it is easy to adduce that Lippmann assumes the bipolar "spectator-object" framework of classical epistemology.³³ According to this framework, knowledge is an analog for sight, and the spectator, in Lippmann's case the citizen, views the illusory appearances of the world, "the pictures in our heads," but cannot access its real or "really real" objects, particularly, the output of "intelligence work." Identical to Plato's solution in the *Republic*, Lippmann decides to grant all governing power to the sagacious few, in what Dewey characterizes as "the revival of the Platonic notion that philosophers should be kings . . . [wherein] the idea of experts is substituted for that of philosophers."³⁴ Not only does

Dewey object that it is unlikely that ignorant masses would bequeath the ruling power to experts, he also rejects Lippmann's assumption of classical epistemology.³⁵ Organisms do not simply intellectualize the appearances of their environment for the sake of discovering hidden objects; instead, they interact with the environment, confront its problematic situations and by attempting to resolve problems they effectively transform the situation.³⁶ Therefore, Dewey's citizens, rather than spectators, can more accurately be compared with artists who continually recreate their environment in order to more closely approximate a meaningful ideal, such as aesthetic excellence or what, in other places, Dewey calls "democracy as a way of life."³⁷

Dewey also critically evaluates the assumptions of the Progressives who espouse the majoritarian creed. While, as previously mentioned, he applauds their support for majority-elected representation, he also chides them for failing to appreciate the full significance of other methods, such as popular discussion and deliberation. According to Dewey,

. . . counting of heads compels prior recourse to methods of discussion, consultation and persuasion . . . Majority rule, just as majority rule, is as foolish as its critics charge it with being. But it never is merely majority rule . . . [it

³¹ Ibid, p. 32.

³² Ibid., pp. 15-16, 33, 82.

³³ R. Boisvert, *Rethinking Our Time*, pp. 35-36.

³⁴ J. Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, p. 205.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 206.

³⁶ Id., *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* (New York: Henry Holt, 1939), p. 55.

³⁷ Id. "Creative Democracy—The Task Before Us." In J.A. Boydston and K.E. Paulos, eds. *Later Works of John Dewey*, vol. 14 (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987): 224-230. Originally appeared in *John Dewey and the Promise of America*, Progressive Education Booklet, no. 14 (Columbus, OH: American Education Press, 1939): 12-17. Dewey comes close to the same pronunciation, saying that democracy is "the idea of community life itself" and "the clear consciousness of communal life" in *The Public and Its Problems*, pp. 148-149.

is also] antecedent debates, modification of views to meet the opinions of minorities, the relative satisfaction given the latter by the fact that it has had a chance and that next time it may be successful in becoming a majority.³⁸

In the Progressive push for legislative reform, they also ignored the educative and community-building effects of deliberation. As Dewey reminds them, “associated or joint activity is a condition of the creation of a community” and the members of that community “demand communication as a prerequisite.”³⁹ By regarding citizen deliberation more seriously, Progressives accomplish three things, according to Dewey; one, they ameliorate their sceptical worries about the capacity of the typical citizen-voter to deliberate intelligently; two, they strengthen their objection to Lippmann that, in time, education may engender an informed public; and, three, they produce an alternative model to Lippmann’s understanding of elections as sublimated battles, namely, elections as opportunities to build a sense of community and to edify or uplift the capacities of the average citizen-voter.

To resolve the conflict between the elitist position, defended by Lippmann, and the majoritarian position, held by Progressives such as Hand, Dewey does more than simply cite their respective advantages and deficiencies. Treating majoritarianism and elitism as pure and antithetical concepts would only engender the same entrenched dualisms, such as mind-body, fact-value and so on, which are rife in philosophy. Instead, Dewey proposes a hybrid concept, *public-spiritedness*, which aids the combatants on either side of the debate to imagine the realization of their respective ideals in practice and

harmony with each other. In *The Public and Its Problems*, Dewey introduces the concept with the shoe analogy:

The man who wears the shoe knows best that it pinches and where it pinches, even if the expert shoemaker is the best judge of how the trouble is to be remedied. Popular government has at least created public spirit even if its success in informing that spirit has not been great.⁴⁰

According to this analogy, not only does self-government begin with citizens, who know the problems of their environment best, but it also devolves on leaders and experts, who together share in the common enterprise of intelligent inquiry, a process of “consultation and discussion which uncover social needs and troubles.”⁴¹ As Dewey clearly affirms, the average citizen need not have the “knowledge and skill to carry on the needed investigation.”⁴² Instead, he must, at the very least, possess “the ability to judge of the bearing of the knowledge supplied by others upon common concerns.”⁴³ Communication between fellow citizens and deliberation about pressing social issues cultivates this ability, and allows citizens to consult experts and experts to consult citizens, thereby avoiding the tyranny of either.

What *public-spiritedness* is not is a transcendent, *a priori* or religious concept. While the term “spirit” carries its own sectarian baggage, Dewey sought to secularize its meaning, making it a close synonym for Spinoza’s “Spirit in Man,” that is, something that “depends on the virtue and capacity of the

³⁸Ibid., pp. 207-208.

³⁹Ibid., pp. 151-152.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 207.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 206.

⁴²Ibid., 209.

⁴³Ibid.

individual person.”⁴⁴ Dewey eloquently conveyed this new secularized meaning of “spirit” in *Experience and Nature*: “Spirit quickens; it is not only alive but spirit gives life. Animals are spirited, but man is a living spirit.”⁴⁵ Thus, by joining “spirit” with “public,” the new symbol, “public spirit,” takes on a whole new set of meanings. These meanings are naturalized in the sense that they have significance only in relation to experience, either as transactions between humans in associated life or between an inquirer and a problematic situation. Therefore, the concept of *public-spiritedness* is not understood, nor does it exist, prior to experience. Only *aposteriori* does it stand for such things as a person’s involvement in public affairs, his criticism of existing institutions, his engagement in “face-to-face intercourse,” his learning the rights and duties of citizenship and, to which Dewey thinks all of the aforementioned contribute, his full participation in an enriching communal life.⁴⁶

Dewey’s arguments in favour of *public-spiritedness*, as a mediating concept between majoritarianism and elitism do not constitute what Lippmann derisively calls the “sophistry that the public and all its individuals composing it are of one mind, one soul, one purpose.”⁴⁷ Nor does *public-spiritedness* represent any single entity or set of institutions. Instead, like democracy itself, it is a lived experience, one guided by a regulative ideal, but for which all concrete manifestations—the voting booth, the public meeting hall, the state or national legislature—are only temporary means for the satisfaction of intermediate ends. In

The Public and Its Problems, Dewey effectively harmonized two conflicting positions, the elitism of Walter Lippmann and the majoritarianism of American Progressives such as Learned Hand, for the sake of showing that, in practice, the ideal of open and fluid deliberation in a democracy can motivate intelligent inquiry, improve “the methods and conditions of debate, discussion and persuasion,” and empower citizens to reconstruct their institutions as they see fit.⁴⁸

3.

The reinterpretation of the Dewey-Lippmann debate that I have argued for here is likewise in the spirit of this ideal; it aims to demonstrate that by re-evaluating accepted interpretations and reconstructing new ones, as a community, we might engender a better understanding and use of “methods and conditions of debate, discussion and persuasion.” In *The Public and Its Problems*, Dewey’s last reference to spirit coincides with a message about the stressed importance of community: “. . . the human spirit will return to seek calm and order within itself. This, we repeat, can be found only in the vital, steady, and deep relationships which are present only in an immediate community.”⁴⁹ In the end, a workable democracy, for Dewey, depends on the establishment of a thriving deliberative community, the self-same deliberative community advocated by contemporary theorists of deliberative democracy.⁵⁰

⁴⁴ Baruch Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, 2nd ed., S. Shirley, trans. (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett, 2001), p. 15.

⁴⁵ J. Dewey, *Experience and Nature* (New York: Dover, 1958), p. 294.

⁴⁶ Id., *The Public and Its Problems*, pp. 211, 213.

⁴⁷ W. Lippmann, *The Phantom Public*, p. 160. J. Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, p. 71.

⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 208.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 214.

⁵⁰ See P. Levine, *The New Progressive Era: Toward a Fair and Deliberative Democracy*. Judith M. Green, *Deep Democracy: Community, Diversity and Transformation* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999). Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson, *Democracy and Disagreement* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996). Jurgen Habermas,

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The Dewey-Lippmann debate took place primarily in the 1920s, beginning with the release of Lippmann's ([1922] 1965) *Public Opinion* and Dewey's ([1922] 1976) subsequent review of that work in the *New Republic*. Before we consider the differences, it is important to note that Lippman and Dewey shared some common ground. Whereas Lippmann saw democracy solely as a means to an end (primarily to a stable and peaceful political and social order), Dewey conceived democracy as both a means and an end, emphasizing its social psychological and normative implications. This reconstructed, simplified version of reality on which citizens base their actions Lippmann termed the "pseudo-environment." Dewey's disagreement with Lippmann, consequently, was a matter of the solutions Lippmann proposed, rather than his diagnosis of the problem. Dewey rejected Lippmann's suggestion that we address the challenges to democracy in the industrial age by empowering technocrats and bypassing the populace. More generally, Dewey believed that Lippmann's resolution of the problem was largely inadequate. In his 1925 review, Dewey noted that the typical paeans to public opinion and democracy skewered by Lippmann were not really the fundamental point. That we believe in the myths surrounding democracy is not ipso facto the reason Prohibition had recently passed or that evolution had been outlawed in Tennessee, following the notorious Scopes Trial. PDF | This paper examines the "Dewey-Lippmann debate" and its enduring significance for contemporary democracy, which currently suffers from deep | Find, read and cite all the research you need on ResearchGate. The examination begins with communication theorist James Carey's original characterization of Lippmann as a positivist seeking a world of objective, accurate information in contrast to Dewey, who identifies the contingent, constructed nature of knowledge achieved through processes of communication. This analysis reexamines Lippmann's and Dewey's positions in light of subsequent arguments that challenge Carey's conclusions.