Moral Jet Lag

John Dewey proposed soon after the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki that citizens of techno-industrial nations suffer from “cultural lag” (LW 15:199-200; cf. LW 4:203-28). He had in mind a sort of moral jet lag, a condition in which most of the basic alternatives we have on hand to think and talk about moral and political life, from customary moralizing to sophisticated theorizing, were developed, canned, and pickled on a shelf so long ago that they now lag far behind the multi-faceted problems that our values must speak to.

These canned values chaff at empirical investigation, yet they are ironically asked to deal with techno-industrial conditions—including our infrastructure for rapidly transporting people and viruses—that were built with the help of an empirical methodology that has moved us many “time zones” beyond the one in which our preserved values and beliefs developed. Our moral imaginations are nourished in this conflicted social matrix, in which we reach for prescientific values and beliefs that are ill-suited to twenty-first century entanglements. The result is moral jet lag.

In *Reason in a Dark Time*, Jamieson explores an implication for climate change (2014, ch. 5) of what we are calling moral jet lag. At least in the Anglophone world, the commonsense prototype of a harmful activity—one for which we ought to feel and be held responsible—is one that has negative consequences that are immediate, localized, intentional, and directed toward
individuals. But this conception of responsibility for harm is eerily out of step with the actual conditions of contemporary lives in complex systems. For example, the greatest harm caused by local greenhouse gas emissions is long-term, widely distributed, unintentional, and not directed toward individuals. Partly on this basis, Jamieson concludes that climate change presents challenges that “go beyond the resources of commonsense morality” (2014, 6). In this context, our current moral jetlag is characterized by inherited moral concepts and theoretical frameworks that are too narrow, homogeneous, and individualistic to adequately meet global problems, exemplified for Jamieson by a lack of fit with anthropogenic climate disruption.

Spreading a novel coronavirus is analogous in several respects to damaging our atmospheric commons. Alongside parallels such as political polarization, incompetent leadership, acquisitiveness, American swagger, and manufactured doubt, analogues between Covid-19 and climate change shed some light on why many Americans have disastrously downplayed both, dismissed them as a hoax, or at least felt little responsibility for the effects of their behaviors. Unlike most greenhouse gas emissions, it’s technically possible to trace the spread of SARS-CoV-2 between individuals; nevertheless, spreading a coronavirus isn’t intentional, isn’t directed toward individuals, and has downstream and widespread effects that aren’t immediately apparent. Viral contagions are nothing new, but our globalized commercial and transportation infrastructure has dramatically increased the rate and scope of pandemics, even as modern epidemiological methods and experimental techniques are placing in our hands some of the arts by which we can intelligently intervene in the spread of contagions. Until we can muster more widely shared trust in pooled social intelligence, guided by the disclosures of patient and cooperative scientific inquiry, American behaviors will remain tragically out of sync
with contemporary conditions. Absent such organized experimental communication, people will continue to die needlessly.

The failure of many countries, most visibly the United States, to effectively navigate climate change and the Covid-19 global pandemic exemplifies our moral jet lag. Our collective responses to the new normal of global disruptions are, in James’s words in *Pragmatism*, “out of plumb and out of key and out of ‘whack’” (1907, 37). The American philosophical tradition that includes James and Dewey has long sought to compensate for the excesses of America’s hyper-individualism and its anti-naturalistic distrust of experimental intelligence. In this brief analysis of our morally jet lagged response to the Covid-19 pandemic, we draw heavily on two highly articulated intellectual resources for America’s moral, political, and educational recovery: Jane Addams’s social ethics and Dewey’s deeply democratic theory of moral and political deliberation.

**Freedom-loving Americans and the Pandemic**

The aversion of many Americans to social distancing protocols is of course due in large part to anti-scientific dismissiveness, politicization, self-absorption, and recklessness on the part of their political representatives. This is infuriating but perhaps not philosophically very interesting. What is more philosophically interesting here arises from the general fact that people earnestly impute meanings to social and political events using ideas that others can barely conceive without caricature, and they use these ideas—ideas that are very often out of “whack” with on-the-ground conditions—to rationalize, justify, and sanctify their conduct. What makes most sense to people is typically due to others with whom they share identities and life experiences, and from whom they’ve inherited their basic intellectual scaffolding. Their ideational

scaffoldings operate as neural paths of least resistance. With their rationalizing ideas in place, people avoid facing realities that might upend their pretenses, and they deny whatever they need to deny in order to stay their course. This is how people become ideally positioned to be, in Dewey’s words, “profoundly moral even in their immoralities” (MW 10:217). To the degree that we disclose, criticize, evaluate (in light of actual conditions), and transform such habituated beliefs, values, and outlooks, we can own them imaginatively in the service of nonreactive democratic inquiry that sympathetically faces realities. In turn, insofar as habits own us mechanically, democracy is a farce because deliberate choice in that case is indistinguishable from mere impulsion.

These general philosophical and psychological observations are relevant to a deeper understanding of the large minority of morally jet lagged Americans who are averse to physical distancing and mask protocols as infringements upon freedom. When a group automatically conceives politics primarily in terms of liberty, and mostly conceives liberty narrowly and negatively as freedom from governmental interference (not positively as freedom to effectively achieve goals), they will be predisposed to balk at face mask mandates, physical distancing regulations, and the like. Instead of dismissing critics of face-covering requirements as ignorant outliers, we must learn at least three lessons from the tragedies that have ensued from this hyper-individualistic hangover:

1. In addition to their anemic notion of liberty, critics of mask mandates and physical distancing as “violating my freedom” are missing other key ethical and political concepts and values that are relevant to thinking democratically about the pandemic. Perhaps most obvious is the virtue of social responsibility, as advocated by Anthony Fauci in the quote above. Additionally, if we're going to deal responsibly with pressing
issues of risk and vulnerability, then we have to grapple with equality of access to health care, of exposure, etc. For example, triage decisions in a pandemic are often “tragic, terrible, and haunting” for caregivers, and these are based on contestable values. When a narrowly utilitarian value of saving lives in the most efficient way possible is employed, then equity may be sacrificed (Ari Ne’eman, NY Times, 3.23.2020), leading to greater disparities in the healthcare system and a disproportionate number of deaths. We must also grapple with issues of fairness (including issues relating to resource scarcity—such as ventilators and an eventual vaccine), duty/obligation (e.g., do health care workers have a duty to treat?), and rights--beyond negative rights not to be interfered with--such as rights of health care workers and industries co-opted toward the public cause.

2. There are far more interesting and positive things be said about freedom. Are “freedom loving American” anti-maskers safeguarding and defending "the freedom that our forefathers fought for," a popular outlook that journalists encounter at every turn? We recently visited the National D-Day Memorial in Bedford, Virginia. Listening to radio interviews with anti-maskers on the drive home, we were dismayed by the juxtaposition of remembered sacrifices with such a hollow, negative, and reactionary cry of freedom. Taken together with other tendencies with which this view of freedom bears a familial resemblance, and acknowledging the risk here of stereotyping, does it champion freedom to (1) treat thought, inquiry, and science as an effete waste of time, (2) stoke rage and resentment, (3) react to non-whites as the scapegoat causes of life's evils, (3) bend religion toward propping up superficial doctrines, (4) shoot down “do gooder” regulations designed to foster social and environmental welfare, (5) set our national aspirations in accord with our worship of what James called “the bitch goddess, success”
(LW 2:161), and then (7) remove educational opportunities for examining all of the
above in favor of reducing education to nothing but another unstable, market-funded
service sector of the industrial economy? If these tendencies in fact stifle real, on-the-
ground freedom, then raggedly individualistic liberty is the antithesis of freedom rather
than its apotheosis. In stark opposition, like all advocates for a liberal cultural education
in an uphill struggle against anti-intellectual rancor, Dewey dedicated his life to
liberating moral and intellectual individuality.

3. Many deaths could have been prevented if a social ethics predominated
over this myopic conception of freedom that stems from our morally jet lagged “ragged
individualism” (LW 5:45). Admittedly, any concerted, early, and unwavering collective
action bolstered by a coherent moral and sociopolitical outlook would have saved lives,
regardless of whether this outlook was excessively individualistic. In the next section we
argue that a social ethics, exemplified by Addams and Dewey, is most adequate to the
situation at hand.

**Social Ethics for Social Goals**

Young people are saying to themselves: “Wait a minute. I’m young, I’m healthy. The
chances of my getting seriously ill are very low. And in fact, it is about a 20 to 40 percent
likelihood that I won’t have any symptoms at all. So why should I bother?” What they’re
missing is something fundamental: By getting infected themselves — even if they never
get a symptom — they are part of the propagation of a pandemic. They are fueling the
pandemic. We have to keep hammering that home, because, as much as they do that,
they’re completely relinquishing their societal responsibility.
Dr. Anthony Fauci (2020)

If grappling with anthropogenic drivers of rapid global disruption such as global pandemics, climate change, antibiotic resistance, and invasive species is the new normal, it is at least continuous with the old normal of Dewey’s decades: global wars, global pandemics, and global economic crises. In January 1919, toward the beginning of the 1918-1920 H1N1 flu pandemic that infected about a third of the world’s population and killed 50 million people, Dewey had to bail his son out of a San Francisco jail. Sabino had allegedly been caught without a mask during the pandemic (1919.01.21 (03858): Alice Chipman Dewey to Evelyn, Jane, & Lucy Dewey). Some of the Dewey children caught the flu; all luckily recovered. Dewey was in San Francisco preparing to leave with his wife Alice for Japan, where he would write a series of essays celebrating Japanese aesthetics while critiquing its feudal communitarian subordination of individuals to the emperor as the symbol of communal life. A couple of months earlier, on November 11, 1918, the Armistice was announced ending the Great War. Dewey would soon be angered and disillusioned by the Treaty of Versailles which “won the war but lost the peace,” but for the moment the Deweys breathed a sigh of relief, in part because this meant Sabino would not be drafted. The day before the Armistice, their daughter Jane wrote to her sister Lucy from San Francisco that "We still go around masked and all meetings are verboten so there is nothing doing and I may as well quit” (1918.11.10? (02269): Jane Dewey to Lucy Dewey).

Given that these are far from distant or unfamiliar concerns, it is unsurprising that there is nothing radically new in advocating for a paradigm shift away from our moral jet lag-inducing atomistic individualism (and tunnel vision) toward an appreciation of cooperative interdependence and complex systems. Over a century ago, Dewey saw that the then-rising consumer economy, the enclosure and commodification of everything, reinforced lives in which
our imaginative energies are spent on thin and superficial personal dramas rather than being invested in shared goods that have breadth and depth. Commercial interests have “interwoven our destinies” (MW 10:193), he observed, but these interests have been shaped and directed by outlooks that dangerously narrow our sympathies and are ill-suited to the conditions at hand.

Arguably, the practical stupidity of hyper-individualism has grown exponentially over the past century, but the failure to democratically educate and engage “cooperative individualities” (LW 5:75) has long toppled our successes. It was as true in 1920 as it is in 2020 that we need to move toward a social ethics and we need to shift toward democratic deliberation in politics and policy. To negotiate the increasingly complex systems in which our relationships inhere, we must bring meaning and a renewed sense of responsibility to what is otherwise no more than the “flickering inconsequential acts of separate selves” (MW 14:227).

Dewey came to these realizations in Chicago in the 1890s through his relationship with Jane Addams. The philosopher, social worker, international peace advocate (winner of the 1931 Nobel Peace Prize), and community organizer Addams cofounded Hull House on the West Side of Chicago as a settlement house for European immigrant women in 1889, and Dewey joined its Board of Trustees in 1894. Addams and Hull House underscored for Dewey the ever-growing happiness to be “found simply in this broadening of intellectual curiosity and sympathy in all the concerns of life” (LW 5:422). He came to see democracy not just as a way of formally arranging a political and legal system, but as a way of life that breaks down exclusionary social barriers and opens up diverse points of contact. For Addams and Dewey, it was not enough merely to passively affirm, with Kant, that all humans should be equally respected for their innate dignity. They urged that we must actively establish conditions—through communicative, caring
engagement—in which capacities are fulfilled instead of being arrested by denied opportunities and socially imposed limits.

The Covid-19 pandemic and the concomitant intensification of the movement for black lives have catalyzed public recognition that we’re inviting our own destruction by our continued failure to seek systemic explanations and cooperative ways forward. They have contributed to wider recognition that public health, justice, security, sustainability, and the blessings of liberty are shared (and controverted) social goals—that is, goals we can only achieve together.

It is too early to prophecy, but spots of enlightenment appear to have spread because of recent shocks. Alas, we cannot safely assume that subsequent structural changes will themselves be of an enlightened sort. For example, in some countries such as Hungary and China we see an autocratic rather than a democratic turn in Covid-19 responses (Gruszczynski 2020), while in the United States a navel gazing, reckless, misological, and racist dog-whistling politics of “America First” bristles at collaboration and communication across differences. But there are some signs of widespread readiness to give coherent and positive meaning to the relationships that twine us up with each other and with natural systems.

Of course, a crisis at the scale of a global pandemic offers endless tragic examples of how prior inequality is exacerbated by public health emergencies. Covid-19 cases, hospitalizations, and deaths occurred at substantially higher levels among people of color (CDC 2020), and minoritized workers suffered greater economic harm due to the lockdown measures aimed at controlling virus transmission in the U.S. (NPR 2020).

Another group that has been impacted disproportionately by the pandemic, both directly by Covid-19 and indirectly by the subsequent lockdown, is people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. According to The Hastings Center, an ableist perspective in medicine
has contributed to a context in which health care disparities and mistaken views about quality of life have led to undertreatment, and even the denial of critical care for patients with Covid-19 (Savin and Guidry-Grimes 2020). In many cases, scarce resources and overwhelmed health care systems led to triage decisions that were biased in favor of abled people, resulting in the further marginalization and death of people with disabilities (BBC 2020). Some U.S. states developed triage plans to help doctors make decisions regarding limited resources, sometimes factoring in cognitive abilities among their criteria for preferment (Baker, 2020; Baker and Fink, 2020). In sum, people with disabilities may be deprioritized for treatment even as they are more at risk of becoming infected and experiencing complications.

People with disabilities are also more likely to be harmed by politics and policies aimed at mitigating the spread of the coronavirus. Not only are people who need the assistance of others with daily living in more danger of contracting the virus, but they are less able to access the aid of others under lockdown conditions. Workers with disabilities have been disproportionately affected by the epidemic’s economic fallout (Smith, 2020), and the increased reliance on technology while more employees are working remotely has made employment and access to services increasingly difficult for people with disabilities. This is due in part to disparity in access to the internet and computers, along with difficulty in some cases managing the proliferation of complicated technologies and applications (AAPD).

In order to maintain democratic policies that permeate communities and countries, genuinely valuing all lives, we need the help of a social ethics for a broader moral community. To the frustration of earnest utilitarian and Kantian ethicists seeking to justify crisp principle-driven prescriptions about how we should act and assess (which they equate with “doing ethics”), adaptive pragmatists like Dewey and Addams take the good and right to be determined
experimentally, contextually, and democratically rather than primarily by
ciphering aggregate well-being or conforming with antecedently determined law.

For Addams, a proto-ethicist of care, “social” ethics emerges from family and community
relations and culminates in democratic community. Attacking individualism on empirical
grounds, Addams believed that a moral theory true to psychology must be a “social” ethics.
Furthermore, an ethics based on the recognition of the social nature of the self will make for
better, more empathetic, moral and political decisions. M. Regina Leffers writes that for
Addams, “it would not make sense to talk about having an ethical position independent of
relationship to self, other, or community. At this within-relationship-matrix of her position we
find a dynamic principle of respect for self and others” (Leffers, 1993, 73).

Addams discussed this method of social interaction via the idea that social ethics has
evolved as a natural mode of human interaction. It is thus unencumbered by an individualistic
self-interest that she believed was forced into existence by the unfettered capitalism and industry
of the late 1800s. A precursor to the mothering metaphor of the ethics of care, Addams noted
that relationships within families serve as the foundation for ethical relationships that grow in
expanding circles to include neighbors and community. She also observed during her years at
Hull House in Chicago that a social ethics is routinely practiced by those least influenced by the
warping influence of big business, power, and money:

A very little familiarity with the poor districts of any city is sufficient to show how
primitive and genuine are the neighborly relations. There is the greatest willingness to
lend or borrow anything, and all the residents of the given tenement know the most
intimate affairs of all the others. The fact that the economic condition of all alike is on a
most precarious level makes the ready outflow of sympathy and material assistance the most natural thing in the world (1913, 20).

Among Chicago’s immigrant populations, Addams observed people living together under common conditions who normally were as naturally sympathetic toward each other as a parent would be to a child. She saw the model of the family expanded in these neighborly relations to encompass all social levels, infusing individuals with a sense of belonging and care outside of their immediate connections. Drawing from these experiences, she theorized that as we grow out of families into diverse neighborhoods and wider communities, the family claim is broadened to include the social claim (or the state or democratic claim). This is swimming with the current of our social nature, not against it.

In Addams' world of rapid population growth and increasingly associated living, she came to see social ethics both as a natural consummation of human interaction and as an imperative mode of conduct for the survival of individuals, families, and states. To live in close association and diverse communities, to live socially, means to learn to act together for shared ends and values. Addams argued in *Democracy and Social Ethics* that only those oblivious to actual circumstances fill themselves with pride in their personal morality in the face of the pressing need for a social morality in which we join forces for practical reform of social structures (2002, 6). In Dewey’s words in *Human Nature and Conduct*, “what sort of self is in the making” must be identified with the question “what kind of world is in the making” (MW 14:150).

Dewey learned this vital lesson from Addams and Hull House, and it informed his approach to ethical and sociopolitical theories. Mainstream ethical and sociopolitical theorists, then and now, assert *a priori* that their job is to show which antecedently defended, (relatively)
static principles should govern choice. They emphasize getting the theory right and impersonally deciding whose values measure up to its supreme metric. For both Addams and Dewey, in contrast, ethical and sociopolitical theorizing should not be understood on analogy to logical or mathematical problems, but as experiments in “living together in ways in which the life of each of us is at once profitable in the deepest sense of the word, profitable to himself and helpful in the building up of the individuality of others” (LW 13:303).

Social ethics requires that we gauge the health of our democracy by attending to the wellbeing of all our populations, especially those most marginalized and minoritized. Dewey urged that “only imaginative vision elicits the possibilities that are interwoven within the texture of the actual” (LW 10:348). Accordingly, envision a community or country whose leaders called for an Addamsian response to the pandemic: rather than lukewarm mask mandates and highly politicized and lackadaisically applied regulations for social distancing, there would be a strong community response aimed at protecting the most vulnerable among us by consulting our best experimental research and learning our way together toward agreed-upon social goals. Imagine that this response occurred within a more resilient and mature nation that valued equity in healthcare and economic security above ragged individualism. Then evaluate the actual American response in light of what was possible.

**Democratic Decision Making, Wicked Problems, and The Role of Experts**

Soon after his 90th birthday, Dewey was feted at his alma mater, the University of Vermont. Too tired to rise and speak to the crowd in Burlington, he simply said: "I'm thankful for the privilege of living on this good planet, Earth. But living on this Earth has become the supreme challenge to mankind's intelligence" (1975.05.25? [22283]: Herbert W. Schneider to American Humanist Association).
From the foreshortened perspective of living memory, we are indeed in unprecedented times with the Covid-19 pandemic, heaped on top of preexisting conflicts, radical disparities, divisions, and drift. Those of us who work in universities are struggling to help students respond reflectively and resiliently to the needs of our time. We try to help them face the widely shared problems that most concern us, chart a course to clarify and interpret what is going on from a wide social perspective, and critically inquire into these problems with fresh hypotheses. In these ways, we hope, with Dewey, they will be enabled to take part in events “instead of being overwhelmed by them” (MW 13:280).

In the face of circumstances that overwhelm them, people tend to behave much like pinballs ricocheting around a machine. When we’re reactively tossed around, we don’t inquire and communicate, so we’re unable to take part in democratically redirecting the course of emerging events (about which more below), save in the narrowest “one person one vote” sense of democracy exhausted at the polling booth. When we’re overwhelmed, we get caught up in a reactive cascade that leads us to oversimplify situations, neglect context, take refuge in dogmatic absolutes, ignore relevant possibilities for convergence, and shut off inquiry. In this way, we make the worst of our native impulses toward social bonding and antagonism, and we make it impossible to debate and achieve controverted social goals.

Dewey criticized decision-making determined by detached expert calculations of optimal welfare (e.g., 1922, MW 14:139-145), and he simultaneously rejected the populist alternative that we should make public choices based on how forcefully you can drive home your point or sell it in the marketplace of ideas (cf. MW 8:443-445). To be workable for social problems, wherever practicable we should reject the stock dilemma—stemming from a dualism going back at least to Plato—between aristocratic command-and-control decision making by society’s
“enlightened” intellectuals, on the one hand, and mob rule, on the other hand. This purported dilemma is yet another iteration of our moral jet lag. Against the aristocratic view, Dewey observed that the give-and-take of open dialogue and back-and-forth communication is necessary, but against extreme populism, he recognized that public processes fail to meet problems when the day is carried by individuals or groups who pretend to diagnostic expertise that they in fact don’t have.

Democratic communication maximizes the chance that we might find paths that respect legitimate interests, evaluations, and evolving identities of different individuals, institutions, and groups. When “the decider” ignores stakeholders, this raises suspicions about aims, interests, and background assumptions. It also raises issues of transparency and accountability, and it predictably leads, as Dewey observed in *The Public and Its Problems*, to myopic, unworkable policies (LW 2:235–372). When a decision-making process is more than nominally democratic, it seeks out tensions and divergent voices, and it gains legitimacy and direction by evaluating, criticizing, and incorporating them. Dewey consistently warned against overreliance on top-down, expert-driven decisions, and where practicable he advocated participatory processes that engage communities in social learning, fostering a public spirit of consultation to uncover troubles and to organize the expertise to deal with them. “The man who wears the shoe knows best that it pinches and where it pinches,” Dewey wrote in *The Public and Its Problems* (1927), “even if the expert shoemaker is the best judge of how the trouble is to be remedied” (LW 2:364).

In other words, stakeholders are in a better position than detached experts to speak for themselves about how the difficulty pinches. Stakeholders who feel the pinch of the problem legitimately demand inquiry and an ameliorating response. But the situation doesn’t come
prepackaged with their preferred explanations, their specific formulations of the problem, or their proposed solutions. All explanatory schemes are susceptible to our well-studied tendency to automatically fall back on readily available heuristics, so effective public inquiries must be facilitated to make some headway separating the diagnostic wheat from the chaff.

As long as communication hasn’t completely broken down, Dewey held that a democratic education, initially learned at a neighborly scale, can at least somewhat curb our tendency to overreach—that is, to presume that the problem came with my formulation of it. We’re better off experimenting in the direction of genuinely democratic education. Conversely, if we wish to sabotage democratic discourse and inoculate ourselves against communication, public problem-solving, and growth, then here are some diabolical rules we might codify to insure that we fail to achieve social goals: First, treat our conclusions as foregone conclusions. That is, they’re the conclusions that any reasonable person (or person with the right commitments) would eventually come to. Second, assume a single cause for what may appear to be a complex outcome, then insist that our proposed solution is the single definitive solution. Finally, insist that we’re simply unpacking the straightforward meaning that we found right there in whatever is happening. This ensures that we’ll never see our diagnosis of the problem as itself at issue.

But alas, the way we’re diagnosing a problem is itself part of the problem. The popular anti-democratic habit of acting as though any sincere and rightly informed person would formulate the problem or event our way leads us to act as though the real problem is that they don’t get the problem. In sharp contrast, Dewey emphasized inquiry and democratic engagement.
Research in recent decades on “wicked problems,” beginning with Rittel and Webber (1973), has developed this Deweyan democratic spirit. Without canvassing the many senses of “wickedness” in the policy literature, at least two necessary features can be identified that cut through the noise: when we say a problem is wicked rather than benign, we hypothesize at least that (1) there is no single definitive solution and (2) the way we formulate a problem, and the way we appraise success in dealing with it, are themselves at issue. When confronting wicked problems, as Norton observes, “it is necessary to problematize problem formulation itself” (2015, 37), because in these cases even the most sincere and informed participants formulate problems and interpret facts differently. Many contemporary problems are candidates for wickedness in this sense, especially in the complex systems implicated by global pandemics and systemic racial injustice.

Dealing effectively with such entanglements requires a genuine transformation of deeply entrenched habits, systems, and institutionalized practices. Such a transformation appears a distant, and receding, hope to most public intellectuals today. Yet Dewey argued that it was not a mere pipe dream to still believe we can democratically secure better lives (LW 5:269), in part by creating conditions—especially through our schools, but also through our everyday behaviors—for open-ended, thoughtful communication. Instead, a critical mass of Americans exercise reactionary habits that substitute vitriolic antagonism for moral and sociopolitical debate. It’s as if we have deliberately sat out to codify a toolkit of rules to sabotage any chance that argumentation, debate, and persuasion will result in social learning (cf. Weston 2020).

Dewey did not have to live through the era of Trumpist misology in order to be saved from Pollyanna optimism here. His mature writings reveal a chastened, worldly-wise
philosopher who understood that we would be better off if we experiment with how far we can go to create a context for ongoing shared inquiry—not only verbally arguing, but also “on-the-ground experiments in living” (Johnson 2014, 126; cf. Kitcher 2014 and Mill 1986).

Inspired in part by a critical embrace of the social ethics of Addams and Dewey, contemporary work in the American philosophical tradition that includes theorists such as Patricia Hill Collins (1998, 2019) is emphasizing that we understand problems better when we democratically inhabit the standpoint of intersecting identities, while challenging those who invite destruction by assuming that only their own experiences, habituated values, and concerns have overriding force when perceiving, diagnosing, and ameliorating problems. The new normal calls for deeply democratic inquiry. Through it we may learn our way together toward a healthier, more just, more secure, and more sustainable future.

Bibliography

Citations of John Dewey’s works are to the thirty-seven-volume critical edition published by Southern Illinois University Press under the editorship of Jo Ann Boydston. In-text citations give the original publication date and series abbreviation, followed by volume number and page number. For example: (1934, LW 10:12) is page 12 of *Art as Experience*, which is published as volume 10 of *The Later Works*.

Series abbreviations for *The Collected Works*:

EW *The Early Works* (1882–98)
MW *The Middle Works* (1899–1924)
LW *The Later Works* (1925–53)
Citations of Dewey’s correspondence are to *The Correspondence of John Dewey*, 1871-2007, published by the InteLex Corporation under the editorship of Larry Hickman. Citations give the date, reference number for the letter, and author followed by recipient.


