

John Dewey's Philosophy of History as a Guide to the International Order

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Abstract:

John Dewey, dean of American philosophers, never wrote a neat essay entitled, "Philosophy of History." Yet, he did write about history and he did address all of the elements of any philosophy of history at different places in his voluminous writings. If history can be a guide to international order then Dewey's philosophy of history is at the center of that discussion. He wrote to Americans in his book, *German Philosophy and Politics* during World War I in Europe before the Americans entered the war in 1917 the following: "An American philosophy of history must perforce be a philosophy for its future, a future in which freedom and fullness of human companionship is the aim, and intelligent cooperative experimentation the method." Although he was specifically addressing Americans in that important period in world history, his words have the potential of ringing true for all people across the planet, particularly those people living in democracies and those people hoping to live in democracies. To that end, the title of this essay is as follows: "John Dewey's Philosophy of History as a Guide to International Order."

Introduction:

Francis Fukuyama opened an interesting conversation in 1989 when he wrote an article entitled, "The End of History" that appeared in *The National Interest*.¹ His thesis was that liberal democracy as a system of government had prevailed over all others during the past several years in such a powerful way that it was in effect the final form of human government, and consequently, the end of history. Fukuyama was using "the end of history" in the sense of Universal history similar to Marx's reference to the end of history when Marx predicted the process of history will end in a state of communism. Fukuyama's argument met immediate opposition. He said that criticism "...took every conceivable form, some of it based on simple misunderstanding of my original intent, and other penetrating more perceptively to the core of my argument."²

Fukuyama made an immediate response to his critics in *The National Interest*,³ but two years later he wrote *The End of History and the Last Man*⁴ in 1992 which is a brilliant attempt at raising the age old question of whether there can be "a coherent and directional History of mankind that will eventually lead the greater part of humanity to liberal democracy."⁵ Fukuyama argues that there can be such a historical process and he went on to base his argument on two principles, namely, one to do with economics and the other to do with the "struggle for recognition," a struggle defined by Hegel in his "non-materialistic account of History."⁶

Larry Conde entered the conversation with *The End of History*⁷ in 2001 to address the question, "Does history have meaning?" Conde makes an important contribution to the discussion by briefly laying out for us such matters as the following: definition of history; role of the historian; philosophies of history; and a few of the more important theologies of history. Conde's book is important for those interested in the subject of whether history has meaning.

¹ Francis Fukuyama, "The End of History?" *The National Interest* 16 (Summer 1988): 3 – 18.

² *Ibid.*, xi.

³ Fukuyama, "Reply to My Critics," *The National Interest* 18 (Winter 1989-1990): 21-28.

⁴ Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*. New York: Free Press 1992, 2006.

⁵ *Ibid.*, xii-xiii.

⁶ *Ibid.*, xi-xiii.

⁷ Larry Conde, *The End of History*. New York: Writers Club Press 2001.

Two excellent books that dealt with the meaning of history appeared in 2007. Those were as follows: John Burrow's, *A History of Histories*,⁸ a brilliant account of the history of history, a book that is destined to become a classic. Walter Russell Mead's, *God and Gold: Britain, America, and the Making of the Modern World*⁹ agrees with much of Fukuyama's thesis, but goes on to argue that capitalism will continue moving us toward a future of rapid change that will, in turn, cause economic and political relationships around the world to be in flux. Mead believes that the American society "is going to approach this new and so far rather unsettling century with the optimistic faith in the invisible hand that has long been our hallmark."¹⁰

The quest for the role of history in the modern world continues in 2008 with the publication of at least four books that are important. They are as follows: Parag Khanna's *The Second World: Empires and Influence in the New Global Order*¹¹ argues that a new geography of power is occurring in the modern world, and that the world must understand nothing can save us unless we can find a common ground in our minds. Strobe Talbott's, *The Great Experiment: The Story of Ancient Empires, Modern States, and the Quest for a Global Nation*,¹² demonstrates the dilemma of humanity's common fate, namely, "how to reconcile our tribal instincts with our common fate," a problem that is centered in the human condition, including human history and human nature. Gordon Wood, in his book, *The Purpose of the Past: Reflections on the Uses of History*,¹³ takes a different position arguing that historians need to stay out of these conversations. Wood, one of America's outstanding historians says, "Historians who want to influence politics with their history writing have missed the point of the craft; they ought to run for office."¹⁴ Although Wood ultimately agrees with that statement, his thoughts about history are broader than that and indeed are among the most poignant on the subject. Philosophers of history must come to grips with Wood's insightful questions and arguments of depth and substance.

Fareed Zakaria, writing in *The Post-American World*,¹⁵ says, "At the politico-military level, we remain in a single superpower world. But in every other dimension—industrial, financial, educational, social, cultural—the distribution of power is shifting, moving away from American dominance. That does not mean we are entering an anti-American world. But we are moving into a post-American world, one defined and directed from many places and many people."¹⁶ Zakaria argues that America must understand that the rise of the rest of the world will continue, and that it must be willing to share power, create coalitions, build legitimacy, and define the global agenda—tasks that are not at all easy.

Interestingly enough, none of the above authors considers the thought of John Dewey on the subject. Dewey (1859 – 1952) remains dean of American philosophy even today. He is considered that because he wrote the American philosophy, the philosophy of pragmatism or as he preferred, "instrumentalism." No other American philosopher wrote so much over such a

⁸ John Burrow, *A History of Histories*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf 2007.

⁹ Walter Russell Mead, *God and Gold: Britain, America, and the Making of the Modern World*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf 2007.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 413.

¹¹ Parag Khanna, *The Second World: Empires and Influence in the New Global Order*. New York: Random House 2008

¹² Strobe Talbott, *The Great Experiment: The Story of Ancient Empires, Modern States, and the Quest of a Global Nation*. New York: Simon and Schuster 2008

¹³ Gordon S. Wood, *The Purpose of the Past: Reflections on the Use of History*. New York: The Penguin Press 2008

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 308.

¹⁵ Fareed Zakaria, *The Post-American World*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company 2008.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 4-5.

long period of time over so many different academic subjects. Dewey's some thirty nine books and a thousand articles, not only include treatises on metaphysics, epistemology, and axiology but also includes newspaper and newsmagazine articles and poetry as well. He was, indeed, one of the most prolific philosophers and writers of the late 19th through the mid-20th century.

John Dewey had something important to say about history, although he never wrote a neat essay entitled, "My Philosophy of History." Instead, one must search his voluminous writings and piece together what might be called Deweyan principles that could be applied to the elements of any philosophy of history which, in turn, could be collectively called "Dewey's Philosophy of History."

John Dewey's Philosophy of History:

Philosophy of history is an important philosophical question that has been debated and answered by many since the days of Polybius. The question is not an attempt to tell historians how to write history,¹⁷ but rather, the question is focused sharply on whether those of us living in the present can use the past in the present to guide and direct (predict) our future(s), or whether we are caught up in some vast teleological force over which we have no control. If the former, then how does Dewey suggest we do it? If the latter, then the process of history is not within the domain of humankind and the question is moot. John Dewey was a modern liberal, not a classical liberal which suggests he thought humankind has some control over its own progress, a concept which bears investigation.

The focus of this paper, then, is to examine John Dewey's writings on five basic premises that make up his philosophy of history to consider whether he had a metaphysical philosophy of history based in human experience and epistemologically driven for some suggestions that might help improve the use of history as a guide to the international order. The paper will not consider the influence other philosophers such as Kant and Hegel had on Dewey's thoughts on history. There is simply no time to do that. I will, instead, consider those influences at another time.

I want to suggest at the outset of this essay that there have been some very poor interpretations of Dewey's thoughts on history given by scholars over the years. One of the worst was an article written in 1950 entitled, "Some Observations on Contemporary History," in the *American Historical Review*.¹⁸ Dewey read the article and told Merle Curti in a series of eight letters that he was "flabbergasted" at the author's interpretation of his philosophy.¹⁹ Dewey went on to explain and defend his argument on history that he gave in his 1938 treatise on epistemology, *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*.²⁰ I want to say that early in the paper because there are some real misunderstandings of Dewey's thoughts on history that have led readers of those materials to be badly misinformed.

I turn now to a definition of the two broad categories of philosophy given to us by Hans Myerhoff.

¹⁷ Letter from John Dewey to Merle Curti, June 10, 1950. State Historical Society of Wisconsin. Dewey mentions in these letters that he never had any intention of telling historians how to write history. He was concerned only with working through questions in the method of science as it applies to historical inquiry, or what he called the historical method.

¹⁸ Charles M. Destler. "Some Observations on Contemporary History," *American Historical Review*, LV (April, 1950), pp. 503 – 29.

¹⁹ Letter from John Dewey to Merle Curti, June 10, 1950. State Historical Society of Wisconsin. Dewey explained to Curti that he was "flabbergasted" at Destler's statement "...both as the philosophical position attributed to me and at his account of my supposed influence over historical writers."

²⁰ John Dewey, *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* (1938), *Later Works* 12.

Myerhoff's Two Categories of Philosophy of History.

I begin this section with the two categories of philosophy of history that most scholars seem to accept. Myerhoff's is one of those who explains it best. Myerhoff says that philosophy of history falls into two general categories, namely, Speculative sometimes called Metaphysical or Universal History, and Analytical History.²¹ The former refers to the metaphysical or universal philosophies of history of such scholars as Hegel, Marx, Spengler, and Toynbee. Those scholars see history as humankind being caught up in some great teleological sweep of time. Hegel, the father of dialectical idealism, for example, was certain that history was God thinking and that humankind's fate was clearly moving toward Armageddon. Karl Marx, on the other hand, a confirmed atheist who turned Hegel's thoughts upside down with his dialectical materialism, saw the force of history moving humankind toward a perfect state of communism on this side of the grave. Universal History, then, generally argues that humankind has little control over its future because the final outcome has been determined, and consequently, the forces of history are moving humankind toward that given, predestined place.

Analytical philosophy of history doesn't accept a concept of universal history. Analytical scholars see no evidence for a universal history and turn instead to investigating history through the proper epistemological method a kind of scientific historiography. Their focus is on resolving some historical problem such as the cause or causes of the American Revolution or the cause of the rise of Greek democracy. Most historians today are clearly in the analytical camp. I dare say most have little interest in philosophy of history, but instead are much more interested in the historical problem they are hoping their research will resolve.

John Dewey had little interest in such dualisms as Metaphysical History and Analytical History.²² On the contrary, he posits bringing the two together into one philosophy of history that is firmly grounded in democracy, a concept that is particularly interesting today since the world seems to be moving toward political and social democracies even though there remain plenty of tyrants and dictators across the planet.

I turn next to a brief description of five premises on which I propose Dewey's philosophy of history is based.

Premise #1: Human Kind Emerged through the process of natural selection to populate the earth. Dewey said once, perhaps amusingly, he thought it prophetic that he was born the year Darwin published his classic work, *On the Origin of the Species*, because not only did Darwin's thoughts turn the world upside down but because Dewey, himself, was so influenced by them. Dewey would argue that we do not yet know exactly how the natural processes of nature began, although we do have theories that are under investigation. We do know today, however, that historical DNA evidence is very strong that human kind emerged first in Africa and slowly wandered out over the centuries to populate the earth.²³

²¹ Hans Meyerhoff, (ed). *The Philosophy of History in Our Time: An Anthology*. New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1959. 125. Meyerhoff discusses the two categories of philosophy of history in his "Introduction."

²² John Dewey, "Has Philosophy a Future?" First published in *Proceedings of the Tenth International Congress of Philosophy*, ed. E. W. Beth, H.J. Pos, and J.H. A. Hollak (Amsterdam: North-Holland Publishing Co., 1949), pp. 108 – 16, from paper read for Dewey by Sidney Hook at Amsterdam on 14 August 1948 in *The Later Works*, 16: 368. Dewey makes reference to the elimination of dualisms in several places. This reference is only one of those.

²³ Spencer Wells, *Deep Ancestry: Inside the Genographic Project*, Des Moines, IA: National Geographic Books, 2007. Also see, *The Journey of Man: A Genetic Odyssey*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002.

To that end, my first premise underlying what might be called his universal or metaphysical philosophy of history is centered in his argument that humans live in a process of natural selection within a natural world and within a natural temporal order.²⁴ He posits there is no scientific evidence that there is a God involved in the process of human history and there is no evidence that there is not. We simply do not know, and, indeed, cannot know using the method of science because that method cannot produce such a truth. The method of science can only produce “warranted assertions,” meaning high degrees of probability, but not absolute truths. So, lacking evidence that there is a god or that there is not a god guiding human history, humankind is, therefore, responsible for its own history based in human experience. To say it another way, humankind should not blame a god for the death and destruction caused by human beings in the past, present, nor future, nor does it make sense to praise a god for those periods of peace and plenty. Nature acts and humankind must deal with it. We are responsible for our fate in the present and future as those who were alive before were responsible for what they did and for what they handed to us. We are connected to humankind who have gone before us in that way. He writes:

“The ideal ends to which we attach our faith are not shadowy and wavering. They assume concrete form in our understanding of our relations to one another and the values contained in these relations. We who now live are parts of a humanity that extends into the remote past, a humanity that has interacted with nature. The things in civilization we most prize are not of ourselves. They exist by grace of the doings and sufferings of the continuous human community in which we are a link. Ours is the responsibility of conserving, transmitting, rectifying and expanding the heritage of values we have received that those who come after us may receive it more solid and secure, more widely accessible and more generously shared than we have received it. Here are all the elements for a religious faith that shall not be confined to sect, class, or race. Such a faith has always been implicitly the *common faith of mankind* (Italics mine). It remains to make it explicit and militant.”²⁵

Clearly, John Dewey was a *humanist* who believed that we living in the present have the intellectual capacity and the responsibility to improve on building our ethical communities, nations, and world as best we can as we, in turn, hand over our work to our posterity. I will address this more fully later.

Premise #2: Human kind is a Learning Animal Within its own Natural Environment.

Dewey’s argument that humans are totally learning animals is crucial to both his philosophy of education and to his philosophy of history. He develops that premise in several of his major works, but he does so particularly in the first three chapters of his treatise on philosophy of education, *Democracy and Education*²⁶, and then moves on to explain how formal education should be designed and implemented to properly guide and direct human experience and human learning.

I am convinced Dewey’s educational thought is one of the important keys to understanding his metaphysical philosophy of history. Let me explain a bit further.

²⁴ For a much fuller understanding read Dewey’s treatise on metaphysics in John Dewey, *Experience and Nature in John Dewey* (1925), *The Later Works*, 1:110 – 326.

²⁵ John Dewey, *A Common Faith* (1934), *The Later Works*, 9: 57-58.

²⁶ John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (1916), *The Middle Works*, 9: 4-58.

He argued that humans are totally learning animals. He goes on to say that humans do not learn independently of the social order in which they are reared. On the contrary, humans are social, gregarious creatures, not hermits. Their respective social orders or cultures teach as they grow from infant to adulthood. In the process of growth, humans acquire habits that make us who we are. Each of us is a bundle of habits, habits that are so ingrained they appear to be fixed and unalterable²⁷. An example might help to explain his argument. The child reared in Arkansas will acquire *habits* of parents and family, and, as he or she continues to grow, of Arkansas communities. He or she will speak English with an Arkansas accent, not with a New England accent just as a child reared in Moscow will speak Russian with a Moscow accent, not Russian with a Turkmen accent. He or she will accept a world view of his or her community, and will reflect the values of the surrounding culture. If the adult culture provides a proper formal education, the child will learn to become a responsible citizen in a democratic social order. He or she will practice *habits* of living and participating as responsible adults in democratic communities. That particular educational concept will become crucial to the metaphysical philosophy of history Dewey proposes. More will be said of it later.

I turn next to Dewey's concept of time and causation since they are fundamental elements in his epistemologically driven philosophy of history, and, indeed, in any philosophy of history.

Premise #3: Humankind Lives in a State of Nature Where Both Time and Causation are Meaningless Until Humankind Gives Them Meaning Through Logical Inquiry

Any philosophy of history must deal with two important principles, namely, time and causation. Dewey's is no different. I turn first to his principle of time and then to his principle of causation. This section of the paper is rather lengthy, but I can see no other way to get to the heart of explaining how Dewey's philosophy of history can be used as a guide to the international order without doing it.

Dewey's Principle of Time:

I begin this section of the paper with an explanation of what Dewey would say is "Common Sense" time, and then I will move on to explain his concept of time in historical inquiry as a past-present-future continuum.

"Common Sense" Time. Time is meaningless in its natural state, and makes sense only when humankind gives it meaning. Humankind agreed, for example, that one "day" is twenty-four hours long, and that 365 days is one year. Humankind also agreed that twenty-four hours is divided into hours, minutes, seconds, etc. Time on earth, then, is what humankind agreed that it should be, and accordingly, amounts to a category that might be called "common sense" time, a concept of time that can be measured with our watches and with our calendars. "Common Sense" time allows humankind to have a common reference point, and, as such, allows humankind to work together with common references in day-to-day transactions. Once we leave the planet, though, what, then, is a "day," an hour, a minute, a second? What is the reference point? Scientists and physicists, of course, have agreed upon answers to those questions, particularly those interested in inquiry into physics, astronomy and the space program. But, those concepts of time do not necessarily affect the day-to-day transactions of human intercourse. A light year, for example, is important in astronomy, but really does not impact human affairs in the social order which uses "common sense" time for its transactions. The point

²⁷ John Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct* (1922), *The Middle Works*, 14, 4 – 230. The entire book is focused on the role of habits in human nature and conduct.

being made is that humankind has developed a concept or concepts of time and we employ them in social affairs where necessary.

Past-Present-Future Continuum. John Dewey posits *that time becomes meaningful in inquiry only as it relates to some particular problem to be resolved.* The problem sets the limits, the “from which” and “to which,” and time exists only between the two limits. This means that Dewey rejects the view of some philosophers that time is “either endless or uniform flow—or the succession of instantaneous points.”²⁸ To Dewey, then, *time is a logical not an ontological affair.*

Past. All that we have of the *past* are such things that contemporaneously exist as “records and documents; legends and stories orally transmitted; graves and inscriptions; urns, coins, medals, seals; implements and ornaments; charters, diplomas, manuscripts, ruins, buildings and works of art; existing physiographical formations, and so on indefinitely.”²⁹ Taken by themselves these things do not constitute knowledge of the past. They are only contemporary evidence of an existential past that is presently dead; they must be used as evidential data by which to infer the happenings of the past.

Present. Dewey gives the word, “present,” a broad meaning. He writes: “the word ‘present’ does not mean a temporal event that may be contrasted with some event as past. The situation that I am determining when I attempt to decide whether or not I mailed a letter is a present situation. But the present situation is not located in and confined to an event here and now occurring. It is an extensive duration, covering past, present and future events. The provisional judgments that I form about what is *temporally* present (as for example in going through my pockets now) are just as much means with respect to this total present *situation* as are the propositions formed about past events as past and as are estimates about ensuring events.”³⁰ The emphasis Dewey places on the directly experienced, as both the beginning and ending of inquiry, should not therefore be taken to mean that he regards only the immediate to be real.

Temporally, the present is continually moving into a new present. In Dewey’s words, “As the new present arises, the past is the past of a different present.”³¹ This can be seen by the effect that current problems have on past events. When current problems seem to be primarily political, the political aspects of history are emphasized. When current problems are economic, the same is true of the economic aspects of history. This leads to a double process. On one hand, present changes give a new direction to a new perspective; “they set new issues from the standpoint of which to rewrite the story of the past.”³² On the other hand, as judgments concerning the significance of past events change, new instruments for estimating the force of present conditions as potentialities of the future are gained. This means that an intelligent understanding of past history is to some degree a level for moving the present into a certain kind of future.

Future. In common sense usage the future is often taken to mean events that have not yet occurred. It is frequently considered unknown and many times as “out there” and “waiting for

²⁸ John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (1934) *Later Works* 10:29. (Dewey reaffirmed this position much later in a letter to Merle Curti, dated July 11, 1950.)

²⁹ Dewey, *Logic* (1938), *The Later Works*, 12: 230-231.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 227.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 238. (In a letter to Merle Curti of June 10, 1950, State Historical Society of Wisconsin. Dewey called his position, “objective relationism.”)

³² *Ibid.*

us.” John Dewey, however, does not accept such common sense notions of the future as accurate.

It has already been shown that, for Dewey, the present situation means much more than merely the temporal present, the here and now present, and future events. The past and future are bound, perhaps one might almost say, fused, to the present situation. Particularly the future is a part of the present situation that takes into account those events which will likely occur because a particular action is chosen. Dewey provides an example.

While walking down the street, one chances to see a mailbox. It reminds him that he was supposed to have mailed a letter to a friend. He wonders if he had done it. He begins to search his pockets and finds no letter (present). Then he tries to recount what he had done yesterday after writing the letter. Did he mail it or not (past)? Then he projects that if he did mail the letter, he would receive an answer from his friend (future). According to Dewey, the past and future are just as much a part of the present situation as is the searching of the pockets in the here and now, temporal present. Thus, for Dewey, the future is not a separate entity into itself, but is connected with the past and present in a temporal continuum, a past, present, future continuum.³³

Because of Dewey’s concept of future, the solving of a particular problem is not the end of the matter. For Dewey, the solving of the present problem marks an interest and the interest reaches into the future; “it is a sign that the issue is not closed; that the close in question is not existentially final.”³⁴

Dewey’s principle of time contains the following elements: (a) in the natural state of nature, time is an on-going affair without beginning or end; (b) conceptually, time is a logical rather than ontological affair; where past-present-future are bound together in a time continuum and the meaning of time is relative to the problem at hand.³⁵

The study of history, then, occurs in the present and is always *about* the past; the historian’s problem is always his or hers in the present, not the problem of persons or events in the past. Those persons resolved their problems in the past. The historian is making judgments about those resolutions from the vantage point of the present, not resolving issues of those living in the past.

The next principle we must examine briefly is Dewey’s concept of causation.

Dewey’s Principle of Causation:

Dewey explains causation in terms of “Common Sense” causation and “Scientific Causation.” I shall briefly explain each beginning with common sense causation.

“*Common Sense*” Causation. The common sense concept of causation is that an “event can be picked out as *the* antecedent of *the* event in question, and that this antecedent is its cause.”³⁶ Examples are as follows: “A good rain will cause the seeds that have been planted to grow” or “Water quenches thirst,” and so on indefinitely.³⁷ These kinds of generalizations are the sort by which Hume resolved the entire conception of causation. Dewey believes that the trouble with them is that instead of being about temporal sequences they are about two gross temporal events, the “cause” and the “effect.” He argues that it is faulty reasoning to argue that a gross event “cause” produces a gross event “effect” because there is an inappropriate gap of time

³³ Ibid., 226.

³⁴ Ibid., 237.

³⁵ George C. Stone, “Time in Dewey’s Concept of Historical Inquiry,” *Social Science*, Vol 50, No. 3, (Summer, 1975), 131 -135. I have drawn extensively from this article for this section of the paper.

³⁶ Dewey, *Logic, Later Works*, 12: 443.

³⁷ *Ibid.* 446.

that is unaccounted for between the two events. For instance, it would be faulty reasoning to argue the “shot” produced the gross temporal event, a soldier’s death because the shot is not temporally antecedent, leaving out the matter of its being *the* antecedent. The firing of a shot is not sufficiently close in temporal sequence to be a “cause” of death.³⁸ The shot could have missed the soldier. But, if the bullet did strike some vital organ then it would be “causally” connected with occurrence of his death since it would be one of the many events involved in the death. In other words, it means no separation can be made between cause as the antecedent and death as consequent; they are both aspects of a larger, continuous, reality.³⁹

Dewey, then, does disagree with the *validity* of cause and effect relationships as determined by common sense reasoning, although he does believe that certain parts of the common sense method of determining causation are important. One valid role, for example, of cause and effect in common sense is that the terms define each other, and, thereby, define and limit the process to which they are subordinate.⁴⁰

Causation in Scientific Inquiry. Dewey believes that interpreting causation in terms of a gross event (effect) resulting from an antecedent gross event (cause) is faulty reasoning because a time span or gap is left between the two events that must be explained. In the past, humankind resorted to explaining the gap in terms of some mystical “force.” Only by scientific inquiry can temporal gaps be reduced, which will in turn eliminate the concept of “forces.” According to Dewey, this is accomplished by employing universal formulae and generalizations as generalized propositions or laws to achieve the elimination of gaps and thereby form a continuum which is spatially and temporally an extensive individual qualitative unity.⁴¹ By a universal formula he means a non-existential⁴² and therefore, non-temporal relationship of characters preferably written in the form of a mathematical equation such as $E=MC^2$. In itself it is *not* a law; it is a formula by which a particular form of generalization or law can be made, namely, a *universal proposition*.⁴³ The universal proposition or universal law is of the if-then variety and suggests a causal relationship. That is, if such and such occurred, then these consequences *must* follow. This kind of proposition is non-existential and therefore non-temporal in content, and is used to limit and define cause and effect as well as to help suggest reductions in temporal gaps of causal relationships.

A second form of generalization as a proposition is *the proposition of kinds*. This form of proposition is existential and refers to actual conditions as determined by experimental observation.⁴⁴ For instance, the gross qualitative events and immediately observed qualities, such as those which form the content of ideas when arsenic is administered to a human and the human dies, can be transformed into a determined set of *interactions*. The result is a law, and the law states a relation of traits that describe a specific kind. These traits are logically conjunctive-disjunctive. There is no element of sequence in their relations to one another.⁴⁵ An example will help explain what Dewey means.

³⁸ Ibid., p.448.

³⁹ John Dewey, “The Evolutionary Method As Applied to Morality,” Its Significance for Conduct,” *Philosophical Review*, XI (July, 1902), 116.

⁴⁰ Dewey, *Logic* (1938), *Later Works*, 12: 454 – 455.

⁴¹ Dewey, *Logic* (1938), *The Later Works*, 12: 448.

⁴² The word “existential” might be troublesome in this paper. I am using it throughout as Dewey used it.

⁴³ Ibid. 300-309. .

⁴⁴ Ibid. 289-300.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

A body is found outside a tall building. The object of inquiry is to find the cause of death. Observation indicates the body is crushed and mangled. Using a *universal formula*, gravity, a universal proposition is now possible in the form of an if-then proposition: "If a person were to leap, or be pushed, from any particular floor in this building, then that person would fall to the street." Then, by drawing upon knowledge gained as a result of past experience a *proposition of kinds* could be made to the effect: "Past experience has shown that for a body to be in such condition would require a fall of at least ten stories." An autopsy would be held to test the facts of the case. It is entirely possible that the victim died as a result of a heart attack and then fell or perhaps was poisoned and the body thrown out a window. Nevertheless, by using *universal propositions and propositions of kinds* a causal relationship between death and its antecedent can be established.

It is important to note that even though a link has been established between the death and a fall from a building the situation surrounding the death is not yet settled. Provisions have been made now for further inquiry. Was this death a suicide, an accident, a murder? At this point a new set of universal formulae and generalizations must be employed. An examination will be made of the rooms in the building to ascertain where the person was standing before the fall occurred. An examination of the room itself will be made to determine whether a struggle occurred suggesting the possibility of murder. If murder is indicated new inquiries will be held to find the guilty party or parties. On the other hand, the death that occurred does not only concern past matters. Future matters too must be considered. The dead person's relatives must be notified, heirs to his estate must be contacted, and a will must be read. This indicates that the death itself does not end the situation. The temporal process is on-going. It can be seen from this that cause and effect must be relative to a problem to be solved. As pointed out earlier, the past, present, and future are connected together in a time continuum and the problem is a present problem. It is the problem that will set the limits of cause and effect relationship to be determined. Otherwise, any selection of cause and effect will be purely an arbitrary choice.

The importance of Dewey's principle of causation includes (a) replacing the idea of a single cause of a single effect with the idea of means and consequences operating within a larger process; (b) replacing the idea of an ontological interpretation of causation with a logical and functional use of the category; (c) the idea that cause and effect are inseparable; and (d) showing that cause and effect are determined through inquiry.

Summary of Time and Causation:

To summarize, Dewey's principles of time and causation shows that he believes the universe is many processes interacting among themselves, with no all-at-once-beginning, with no all-at-once-end, and with no particular predetermined direction. It is an opened-ended process, and man, as a part of this universe, is also part of this open-ended process. This means that humankind's destiny is not teleological, that there is no evidence of divine providence that can be relied upon to guide us toward some predetermined end. Humankind must form its own future out of consequences of present problems, and for Dewey, history and the method of history are important instruments in doing so.

The next section will examine Dewey's method of history.

Premise #4: The method of history is identical with the method of science. Let me say at the outset that I will not be examining each element in Dewey's argument in inductive logic sometimes called the method of science and that he also calls the method of history. I assume that those elements are so well known that it would not be productive here. There is no time here

to examine some specific principles that are a part of his logic of historical inquiry. I have dealt with those principles elsewhere. My focus here will be limited to one term, “concept in historical inquiry.”

Dewey was convinced that history is a science,⁴⁶ but his concept of history as a science differed from that of Ranke and the Positivist School. I begin with Dewey’s definition of history found in his book, *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*, as follows:

“History is that which happened in the past and it is the intellectual reconstruction of these happenings at a subsequent time.”⁴⁷

He went on to say,

“The notion that historical inquiry simply reinstates the events that once happened ‘as they actually happened’ is incredibly naïve.”⁴⁸

The differing views of the method of science in history between Ranke’s positivism and Dewey’s instrumentalism is that positivists believe the method of science can be used to reconstruct the past in the present *as it actually happened*. Dewey disagrees saying such an idea is naïve. The past has not left enough artifacts that survive into the present to reconstruct the past as it actually happened. It remains to be shown Dewey believes that history amounts to past events that can be intellectually reconstructed in the present to resolve some present problem in such manner as can be used to help guide and direct the present into a future, an idea that requires some particular explanation.

Dewey’s suggestions for resolving present problems, including those of the world order, is to remember that such problems always occur in the present, and that we can use the past as a guide to resolve them thereby sending our futures(s) off in the direction we want it (them) to go. To be sure, many scholars have ridiculed the idea that history can be used to predict the future, and, interestingly enough, Dewey would agree with those critics. Let me explain by example.

Currently American politicians and their followers sometimes use two analogies to explain American military involvement in the contemporary Iraqi conflict. One side claims that if America leaves Iraq, then it will be a Munich “sell out” all over again. The belief is that America will be showing weakness to her enemies, and they, in turn, will take advantage of that weakness resulting in an eventual larger conflict. The other side claims, if America does not leave Iraq, then it will be another Viet Nam. Their belief is that the Iraq conflict is much like the Viet Nam conflict, a conflict that cannot be won and consequently will be endless. Dewey would see both arguments as flawed because each *concept*, “Munich” and “Viet Nam,” is not nearly well enough defined. He would emphasize that a *well defined concept* is critical to predictions that have a high degree of probability or accuracy. Let me explain.

The word “*concept*” is *critical* to understanding Dewey’s philosophy of history. I must take time here to define it as he does. A *concept*, he says, is an idea that has been successfully used in solving a problem, and therefore, has taken on meaning; that is, it has acquired an accepted status on its own behalf.⁴⁹ Thereafter, it is employed not tentatively and conditionally, but with assurance as an instrument to understand and explain things that are still uncertain and

⁴⁶ Dewey, *Logic*. (1938), *The Later Works*, 12: 230.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* 235-236.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 236.

⁴⁹ John Dewey, *How We Think* (Boston: Heath and Company, 1933), p. 149.

perplexing. In his words, "...established meanings, taken to be secure and warranted, are conceptions."⁵⁰ That leads him to say "every common noun that is familiar and so well understood in itself that it can be used to judge other things expresses a concept."⁵¹

Concepts are not permanent and absolute. As logical inquiry produces new knowledge that affects and improves our understanding of the concept, then the concept takes on new and more accurate meaning with improved possibilities for more accurate predictions. At one time it was believed that the atom was indivisible. As new inquiry into the nature of the concept, "atom," produced new knowledge about its structure, then we were able to make more accurate predictions about its function.

It is important to note that "the conceptual material employed in writing history is that of the period in which a history is written."⁵² This means the historian has only that material of the historic present from which to formulate principles and hypotheses. As the culture changes the prevailing conceptions in that culture change; the result is that new standpoints for viewing, appraising and ordering data arise and, accordingly, history is rewritten. When this occurs, the historian finds materials once passed over are now acceptable as data "because the new conceptions propose new problems for solution, requiring new factual material for statement and test."⁵³

Dewey places much weight upon the importance of concepts in historical inquiry and he sharply criticizes historians for not doing so. He writes:

The formation of historical judgments lags behind that of physical judgments not only because of greater complexity and scantiness of the data, but also because to a large extent historians have not developed the habit of stating to themselves and to the public the systematic conceptual structures which they employ in organizing their data to anything like the extent in which physical inquirers expose their conceptual framework. Too often the conceptual framework is left as an implicit presupposition.⁵⁴

Dewey's reference in the above quotation says that physical scientists have identified their concept more clearly than those in the social sciences. Let me provide an example. "Pneumonia" is a concept well-defined in physical inquiry. As more and more inquiry identified more clearly the events that occur in the concept, pneumonia, has, in turn, allowed physicians to predict on the basis of knowledge of pneumonia with more and more accuracy whether a patient has or does not have pneumonia. The same is true of the concept, metabolism. Let your mind run free with examples of concepts in the physical sciences.

Historians, on the other hand, have not clearly defined their concepts with the clarity of the physical scientists. When Dewey was writing, he might say that such concepts as "civil war" or "revolution" in historical inquiry were not clearly defined. He would go on to say, if historians would inquire into the nature of civil wars and revolutions rather than inquiring into only individual civil wars and individual revolutions with no interest in the concepts, civil war or revolution, then we would have a much better understanding of the events that occur in such concepts. I do not want to get into an argument here about whether historians are doing such

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, p. 149.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 150. I have used the 1933 edition for footnotes 18, 19, 29. Dewey expresses himself a bit differently in the original 1910 edition of *How We Think* (1910) *The Middle Works*, 6:278 - 281.

⁵² Dewey, *Logic*. 1938 *The Later Works*, 12: 232-233.

⁵³ *Ibid* 233

⁵⁴ *Ibid*: 232

things. There are historians interested in clearly defining such concepts and their studies are continuing. I wish to merely point out his concern that concepts historians used were not clearly defined.

Is Dewey's criticism still valid today? Let me return for a moment to what happens when concepts are not clearly defined and political leaders put them into action.

"Munich" and "Viet Nam," as pointed out above, are examples of concepts that are currently taking on meaning as standards of reference, and consequently, are becoming functional explanations of *predicting* America's involvement in the Iraqi conflict.⁵⁵ But, they are *flawed* concepts because the Iraqi situation is not similar enough to either "Munich" or "Viet Nam" to be used as concepts that can adequately predict or guide international conduct in the Mideast.

The situation leads Dewey to make a rather interesting observation that social inquiry has not met the logical conditions for scientific status. He writes:

Until social inquiry succeeds in establishing methods of observing, discriminating and arranging data that evoke and test correlated ideas, and until, on the other side, ideas formed and used are (1) employed as **hypotheses**, and are (2) of a form to direct and prescribe operations of analytic-synthetic determination of facts, social inquiry has no chance of satisfying the logical conditions for attainment of scientific status.⁵⁶

Dewey may well be correct when he says that, but I think he would agree that politicians, world leaders, and the rest of us *often* use ideas as concepts that are not carefully and clearly defined and that the consequences for doing so are often disastrous. If world leaders, for example, act on the concept that Iraq is another "Munich" or act on the concept that Iraq will lead to another "Viet Nam," then the consequences of their actions will likely not lead to the kind of future intended. Similarly, if we vote for politicians who make such claims, then we are running the risk of placing in office leaders who will actually act on such poorly defined concepts.

Dewey thought through the direction Americans ought to be moving their present situation(s) toward, if Americans want to live the good life in socially democratic, ethically democratic, and politically democratic society(ies). I am suggesting it as an element in his philosophy of history that might be considered as a guide to the international order. I turn next to the suggestions Dewey made for progress toward such a society(ies) a concept he called the "Great Community."

Premise #5: "The Great Community" Or What Might Be Called Dewey's Concept of Philosophy of History That Is Driven by his Epistemological Method. I turn now to the social order John Dewey thought humankind ought to be moving toward, and how his philosophy of history might be used to bring it about. I want to say at the outset that there are those who disagree with me about Dewey's own conviction that the Great Community was a

⁵⁵Evan Thomas, "The Mythology of Munich," *Newsweek*, June 23, 2008, Vol CLI, No 25, New York: 23-26. I cite this article as an example of the way the concepts "Munich" and "Viet Nam" are being used in the current presidential election year. Their use is so commonplace that it is almost needless to cite this source.

⁵⁶*Ibid.* 485.

realistic possibility.⁵⁷ I believe, however, he never abandoned the idea, and that it remained at the center of his social thought throughout his life.

In 1927, Dewey finalized his concept of “community” in the book *The Public and its Problems*⁵⁸ when he developed the idea of the Great Community(ies). There he proposed that the American Second Industrial Revolution had made the American Republic an industrial giant with almost unimaginable potential to those living even a generation earlier. America had, in that sense, become a Great Society. But, he went on to say, Americans must not think that they had reached the pinnacle. There was much more to be done. He proposed the next step should be to move the Great Society into the Great Community(ies), a society, or more accurately, *societies of peaceful, ethical, social democracies at all strata of the social order*.

Dewey argued that democracy is not limited to political democracy, but instead social democracies precede political democracies since the latter grows out of the former. He wrote in *The Public and Its Problems*, “Democracy must begin at home, and its home is the neighborly community.”⁵⁹ He also said, “Regarded as an idea, democracy is not an alternative to other principles of associated life. It is the idea of community life itself. It is an ideal in the only intelligible sense of an ideal; namely, the tendency and movement of some thing which exists carried to its final limit, viewed as completed, perfected.”⁶⁰ In other words, democracy belongs to the people; they own it. They make their collective decisions together day after day according to their individual and collective experiences of life, and they are responsible for the consequences that follow. It should not be surprising then that his concept of the Great Community included civic club as community, church as community, school as community, and university as community to mention only a few. Let me explain a bit further.

I am a member of a community of the local Kiwanis Club. I attend meetings once each week and participate, say, on planning a given community project that is designed to help children. After the meeting, I return to my work at the University where I teach a class, another community. That afternoon I attend a meeting of the University Senate which, in Dewey’s thought, is another community. I participate in the Senate meeting, and then, once the meeting is over, I go to another meeting at my church. My church meeting is another community made of up different people from those I met with in my civic club and university meetings. Perhaps, later that evening I attend a meeting of my political party where I am asked to run for city mayor, and I accept to do so. An election will be held in the larger community of the city, and, say, I am elected. I will now be a part of a local political community (city council, building committee, courts.) and will be voting on issues that affect the larger community, the city. The point is that I and others travel from one community to another in any given day helping make decisions at each meeting. I carry my ethics with me from place to place as I try to persuade others to join me on a vote on some particular issue. When the vote is taken, I will find myself on the majority on one vote and perhaps in a minority on another vote. Majority rules in a democracy, but one must realize that the majority is rarely the same majority on each vote taken. When I find myself

⁵⁷ Alan Ryan, *John Dewey and the High Tide of American Liberalism*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1995), 219 – 220. Ryan suggests Dewey may have simply been asking too much of the American democracy when he proposed that the people should move the Great Society to the Great Community.

⁵⁸ John Dewey, “Search for the Great Community,” in *The Public and Its Problems* in *John Dewey. The Later Works* (1927) 2: 324-350. Also see, Robert B. Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1991), particularly Part III, “Toward the Great Community (1918 – 1929), 231 – 373.

⁵⁹ Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems* (1927), *The Later Works* 2: 368

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 328.

on the minority on a given vote my job then is not to take up arms against the majority, but to use rational thought buttressed with evidence to support my case and ultimately to change the minds of the majority to vote as I have chosen. Democracies, then, amount to the people making decisions in one community or another day in, day out, and, as such, they require freedom of movement and freedom of thought and speech to work properly in their quest for the public good.

Dewey also identified and defined another kind of community, namely, the “associated community.” The latter amounted to people who belong to organizations that never actually meet in one place but who communicate by telephone or letter but who, nevertheless, work together toward some common end. Insurance companies, for example, might have boards who never meet in person but who visit by telephone or by letter. Such organizations, he said, actually have members who sometimes know each other more intimately than people living in the same neighborhood. The “associated community” concept is particularly important in today’s world of the internet and other high speed communications systems.

The above social and political communities and associations exist across the planet in democracies, but their actual organizational structures differ. Consequently, there is no one model of democracy, but instead, there are models of democracy across human societies who are fortunate enough to live in them. It follows, then, that political democracy in any democratic nation is the collective experience of the people in that particular nation. It helps explain why we have, for example, parliamentary democracies and presidential democracies of varying forms. The habits of the people in any given democracy are fused to their particular form of democracy and they are usually not willing to give up or change their particular democratic system because it goes to the very heart of their cultural experiences.

Dewey challenged American society at *all* community levels, including political communities--governments of the United States--national, state, and local—to operate as Great Communities; he was convinced that Americans and humankind in general had the potential to build such ethical society(ies) if they would only agree to marshal their forces to *make it (them) work*. He challenged the American people in 1915 to do that when he said,

An American philosophy of history must perforce be a philosophy for its future, a future in which freedom and fullness of human companionship is the aim, and intelligent cooperative experimentation the method.⁶¹

He might well suggest those words to the international community today. He would suggest, I think, that it is not an American philosophy only because he told us, as noted above, that social democracies emerge from human experience, and that consequently, those experiences will be different from society to society. He would say that international problems like problems in the local community emerge *naturally* from the day-to-day situations of life. We look to the past for similar situations that might offer guidance and direction for the present problems we are experiencing. We employ well defined *concepts* as standards of knowledge that we have learned from *universal propositions* and *propositions of kinds* as ideas to be considered as a resolutions to the present problems. Any given idea, however, is not necessarily in and of itself the proper solution. We must look to the consequences of any idea proposed to project what the future will be if that idea were to be employed. The United States, for example, could have chosen to end the conflict in Vietnam by dropping nuclear weapons on Hanoi. It may have ended the conflict, but what would have been the consequences of actually employing such an idea? The evidence shows that it was not the future consequences the United States wanted to

⁶¹ John Dewey, *German Philosophy and Politics* (1915), *The Middle Works*, 8:204.

occur. The people of the United States and the people of the world would have taken to the streets to demand the removal of those in political power in the United States, not to mention what other future consequences for world politics would have been fused to such an idea had it been employed in that present. Certainly, we would be living a very different kind of social and political world today.

I am suggesting Dewey would encourage the idea of the Great Community to the international community today as an end-in-view for decisions being made in the present. As such, the people in any given community would need to embrace it as an ideal when they resolve their individual and collective problems (Dewey considered all problems to be ultimately social problems.). I agree with Fukuyama, though, that the international community is not heading toward a world government anytime soon. He writes:

“It would therefore appear that we will not get beyond the nation-state anytime soon as the fundamental source of legitimate democratic authority. In place of global government, we will have to be satisfied with global governance, that is, partial international institutions that promote collective action among nations and that create some degree of accountability among them.”⁶²

Global governance is facing some difficult situations today. Inquiry into the physical sciences has produced larger atomic bombs and more advanced weapons that we tell ourselves will protect us from aggressors, but we are often unwilling to use the knowledge of social inquiry to resolve potentially violent issues. We gladly purchase automobiles physical inquiry has produced that pollute our environment and provide jobs for workers, but we are often unwilling to use the knowledge of social inquiry to demand cleaner industries and cleaner modes of transportation because to do so would require vast amounts of wealth that would need to be spent to improve the situation. We have used our knowledge of physical inquiry to grow more and more hybrid crops and to create more and better medicines, but then we are reluctant to use the knowledge of social inquiry to make certain such products reach all of the people.

Dewey’s philosophy of history is not a perfect future world of Hegel or Marx or most any other universal historian who suggests a perfect future is out there waiting for us as the forces of history move us toward it. Dewey’s democratic instrumentalism (using ideas as *instruments* to resolve problems) is not like that. Day-to-day life in a democracy really amounts to people making decisions to resolve their problems, individually and collectively, from the present into perpetuity. He was very well aware of democracy’s problems and its fragility, particularly as it is being built in cultures that have not had a long experience with it. He knew full well that we will have ambitious men and women who want to lead the people or who might even wish to take all power into their own individual hands. History has taught us that democracies do not necessarily produce perfect societies. After all it was a democracy that brought Herr Hitler to power; it was a democracy that ushered in Napoleon; it was a democracy that brought the Round Heads to lead the Parliament in England; and it was a democracy that brought about a terrible civil war to the United States. Dewey knew full well that democratic societies will likely have social undesirables with them well into the future, i.e., criminals of all sorts, murders, terrorists, and whatnot. Still, he had great faith in the people to make proper ethical choices to lead their lives with as little violent disruption as possible. He wrote a considerable amount on ethics in a democratic social order, but there is no time here to analyze his thoughts on that subject. As an educator, though, I cannot help but add that one social institution on which he placed great faith was a public school system that included an end-in-view for students to learn to become ethical, responsible citizens in a democratic social order. Another

⁶² Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, 351.

social institution would be journalism in this age of instant communications. He proposes journalism, not as a means of propaganda, but rather as a means of critical inquiry into the actions of those making or carrying out decisions.

Is Dewey's Great Community similar to the concept of liberal democracy that Fukuyama proposed, and, if so, would it amount to the end of history? Certainly there seems to be a similarity between the two proposals at the very least. But, as far as I know, Dewey never suggested his idea of a Great Community would amount to the end of history. It would be uncharacteristic for him to do so. He would, I think, repeat what I said above, namely, that it would be the height of absurdity for him to predict such a thing because that would be up to the public in any given social democracy.

There are those who disagree with the importance I assign to Dewey's idea of the Great Community. Alan Ryan, for example, thinks Dewey never made the idea clear. He writes: "The vagueness of his view of 'the great community' leaves us wondering whether his view of participatory democracy is that of the student insurgents of the 1960s or that of the Quaker meetinghouse anyway not sure we can run a country of 280 million on either basis."⁶³ Ryan's biography of Dewey is excellent, but I am not sure whether he understands Dewey was thinking more of a long term process that will take years, perhaps hundreds, than an immediate goal. Dewey gave us the guidelines and then left it up to us to begin building the Great Community(ies). I read Dewey to mean he that he believed he could do nothing more since he said the present belongs only to the living. The living and only the living can fuse their present into a future(s) where the majority wants it to go. We living at this time are completely responsible for our actions and our future. He says it is our responsibility to drive the process that will lead to great communities, an ideal that can never become a perfect state but one that can be passed from generation to generation in a continuous process of improvement. When communities, including the international community, resolve their problems *as social democracies*, which, in turn, send their futures off in a particular desired direction, then, we are putting into practice what Dewey calls his philosophy of history.

I end this essay with Dewey's words he wrote toward the end of his life at age 90, and one of the most important pieces of evidence I can cite that Dewey never abandoned his idea of the "Great Community.

He said:

"There is now a supreme challenge, a supreme opportunity. If Galileo and his successors could look upon this gathering here today they would say 'It is for you to do for the very life of man what we did for the physical and physiological conditions of that life. Discovery of these conditions was for us the immediate task that determined the end of our search. You possess the results of this search. It is for you to use them as means to carry forward the establishing of a more human order of freedom, equity, and nobility. We accomplished the simpler and more technical part of the work. It is for you, possessors of a torch lit by our toil and sacrifice to undertake, with patient and courageous intelligence, a work which will hand on to your successors a torch that will illuminate a truly human world.'"⁶⁴

⁶³ Alan Ryan, *John Dewey and the High Tide of American Liberalism*, New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1995. 367.

⁶⁴ John Dewey, "Has Philosophy a Future?" First published in *Proceedings of the Tenth International Congress of Philosophy*, ed. E. W. Beth, H.J. Pos, and J.H. A. Hollak (Amsterdam: North-Holland Publishing Co., 1949), pp.

Conclusion: Dewey tells us the human race must accept responsibility for its own future. We alone are responsible for our present actions and our actions are always our future(s). He argues there is no evidence divine providence is watching and guiding us toward any “perfect” society or are there any “laws” governing human progress. Humankind has progressed to global societies in the 21st century with knowledge that can destroy the planet by nuclear war, biological war, or pollution of various kinds. In short, we are alone on the planet and our welfare depends solely upon us.

Dewey’s philosophy of history is a challenge to common persons to make life better on this planet by building Great Community(ies), societies of peaceful, ethical, social, and political democracies at all strata of the social order. He was convinced that it is completely within the power of common persons living in democratic social orders to do that, although he told us he could not predict whether we would do it or not. Such decisions, he said, are always the responsibility of the living, not the dead or the yet unborn. The living, inherit from the past what we inherit and it is our responsibility to make those things better as we continually pass them to the next generation for improvement in a process that goes on ad infinitum.

Dewey saw common individuals as dynamic, thinking, active creatures who are not passive, but who possess instead active, doing, minds and who can use the past to guide and direct their own future(s). It is fair to ask him whether common persons are *capable* of using past knowledge in the present to guide and direct the resolution of present problems into a future we desire. *Can* common people actually build societies of peaceful, ethical, social, and political democracies at all strata of the social order? Dewey’s is, of course, “Yes but it will take time!” Humans must learn how to build such communities, a process that will depend upon democratic educational systems that can properly teach the young how to build and live as responsible citizens in a democratic social order. He encouraged those living in the American second industrial revolution to begin building great communities right away. He realized the process would likely take hundreds of years to spread properly across the planet.

Is Dewey suggesting, therefore, that history can end in a perfect society of Great Communities? I don’t know that he saw an end of history in the sense Fukuyama proposes because he seemed to say that the success of great communities always rests with common people living in any given present. Problems facing them will continue to be decided by majority and minority decisions, a process that rarely pleases those in the minority on any given issue. Successful democracies remind us of Sisyphus in Greek mythology whose destiny was to push a heavy rock uphill. They are continual hard work that can be lost whenever those living in any given present decide to give them up and move to some other form of social life. The important question is “*Will* common persons agree to *begin* building Great Communities?” If so, then Dewey’s philosophy of history becomes a guide to the international order.

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