BOOK REVIEWS

Paringer, W.A. (1990). *John Dewey and the paradox of liberal reform.* Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 216 pp., $39.50 (hardcover).

Faced with our current social and educational "crisis," Paringer's project helps to warn us against resurrecting John Dewey's liberalism as the philosophical foundation of social and educational reform. In contrast Paringer argues for social and educational transformation based upon critical theory grounded in praxis. He writes, "The liberal and progressive praxis of John Dewey and the model of reform — existentially and philosophically — today no longer possess a vision, nor the means to realize an appointed agenda" (p. 140). According to Paringer the inability of Dewey's philosophy to provide a transformative vision is based not on any omission in Dewey's position but on its very premises.

These premises comprise what Paringer refers to as the four pillars of pragmatism: science, democracy, nature, and experience. Paringer proceeds to "deconstruct" these pillars, revealing how they obstruct rather than facilitate progressive transformation. In the final analysis, while Dewey's liberalism is capable, according to Paringer, of "attending to the dualisms of thought," it is simultaneously incapable of analyzing and transforming "concrete contradictions in the *materialized world*" (p. 108, italics original). In other words, Dewey's liberalism fatally neglects a structural analysis of power.

The four pillars constitute the foundation of what Paringer refers to as Dewey's unification of the "self-society" relation. This relation is conceived in terms of Platonic socialization and Rousseau's individuation, the contrast between the integrative, reproductive function of education and its developmental function. For Dewey these functions are mutually compatible given the wholesale democratization of American society, a democratization that is continuously evolving.

This evolution of democracy is based upon Dewey's naturalistic conception of society which assumes evolutionary advance as well as upon his notion of science as objective, value-free, empirical inquiry in the service of planned social change. On the one hand, however, Dewey's naturalism results in an organic conception of society as arranged in terms of a functional hierarchy, wherein inequality is rendered natural; on the other hand, his conception of science neglects the historical fact that science and technology are not neutral endeavors but are controlled by, and used in, the interests of those at the top of the functional hierarchy to maintain inequality.

Paringer also sees Dewey as rightly rejecting the view of the individual inherent in the traditional conception of socialization as being a "product determined by environment or culture" or "a product of historical or material forces" (p. 125). However, Dewey assumes that human subjectivity is an inherent quality of human nature and therefore not in need of critical analysis. This assumption leads to a failure to account for the "dialectical and ideological tensions of human being; and the implicit reassertion of dualistic epistemology of subject and object, which privatized the individual and depoliticized the social" (p. 125). This results in a conception of experience based upon interaction rather than transformation.

From this deconstruction Paringer's central thesis emerges: Dewey's liberal pragmatism wrongly assumes the compatibility between a liberal, capitalist society and democracy, neglecting the fundamental contradiction inherent in liberal democracy between both capitalist social relations and political equality and social justice, thereby concealing its regressive (as opposed to progressive) nature. Liberalism thus leads to an "ideology of reform" which "finds *something* problematic with the existing social order, but *within* the parameters or logic of the paradigm itself" (p. 108, italics original). Consequently, while advocating intervention on the individual level, the influence of larger forces and structures of power and privilege are not even considered as problematic, thereby negating the possibility of social transformation. This is the paradox of liberal reform.

Based upon this critique of Dewey and liberalism, Paringer offers the beginnings of a "new philosophy" grounded in "an analysis of social justice [which] allows us to 'demythologize' the ideological construction of human being" (p. 140). For Paringer, ideological critique and praxis form the basis of a philosophy which can be transformative. This philosophy, according to Paringer, calls for a movement from reform to transformation, from reconstruction to deconstruction, from liberal to critical, from progress to sustainability, from pragmatism and scientific method to historical, ideological critique, and from liberal to radical democracy.

However, if ideological critique is to be widespread (a necessary condition for social transformation) individuals must have access to democratic public spaces within which ideology can be deconstructed and new values can emerge (e.g., solidarity and concern). Democracy in this sense is "developmental," and, although blind to structural analysis, Dewey *did* advocate participatory forums wherein new values could emerge. In fact, liberalism does guarantee, at least in theory, freedom of thought and association, necessary conditions for the emergence of ideological critique. This suggests that inherent in the contradictions of liberal democracy is the possibility of social transformation (e.g., social movements demanding civil rights and political equality). Perhaps another paradox? Nevertheless, Paringer executes a penetrating, insightful

critique of Dewey and liberal reform. It is a detailed, sophisticated book worthy of careful study and wide readership.

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Axelrod, P. (1990). *Making a middle class: Student life in English Canada during the thirties*. Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 269 pp., $34.95 (hardcover).

In this book the author examines what is ironically a new phenomenon in the historiography of universities — students. How have practitioners in the field managed for so long without half their baggage? Part of the answer lies in the fact that the history of higher education has been written from the top down and the further one moves from the spiritual center, the classroom, the more marginal and unreal it seems.

Axelrod redresses this imbalance to a great extent in his discussions about who went to university, the academic culture, the professional culture, the student movement, and extracurricular life.

The author tempers many extreme notions of the period. Universities were not "loafing places for rich men's sons"; most students came from the middle echelons and many were women. Academic performance of Canadian students was neither "universally outstanding" nor "entirely wretched" (p. 49). And their sex life (to the extent that this secret has been discovered) was "neither as loose as critics feared nor as pristine as officials pretended" (p. 49).

Axelrod underscores the trials of Jews and women. Enrollments of the former in arts, medicine, and law were sometimes systematically curtailed. Male lawyers, doctors, dentists, and engineers earned considerably more than their female counterparts. And so we have more sad evidence of a society that took so long to see itself.

The book possesses all the strengths of academic history — control of sources, mastery of a body of literature, impartiality, and rigor, both analytical and methodological. It also manifests to some degree a weakness which within the next generation will prove fatal to the entire field of scholarly history — the failure to adequately, honestly, and intimately engage the reader.

It is no easy problem to solve — making quantification interesting. At least part of the solution rests in a reformation of the *language of academicism* which is so muted, so neutral, so reserved, and so subdued that it reveals almost nothing of the researcher's natural delight and enthusiasm. That is, the language