

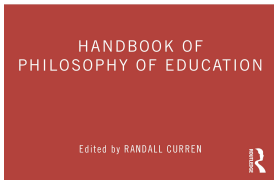
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On: 02 Apr 2023

Access details: *subscription number*

Publisher: *Routledge*

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: 5 Howick Place, London SW1P 1WG, UK



## **Handbook of Philosophy of Education**

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### **Education for a Challenging World**

Publication details

<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781003172246-3>

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**Published online on: 26 Oct 2022**

**How to cite :-** Philip Kitcher. 26 Oct 2022, *Education for a Challenging World from: Handbook of Philosophy of Education* Routledge

Accessed on: 02 Apr 2023

<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781003172246-3>

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# 1

## EDUCATION FOR A CHALLENGING WORLD

*Philip Kitcher*

### **The Wrong Problems**

In many nations around the globe, contemporary educators understand that the young people they teach will face significant challenges. Reasonably, they identify their task as one of preparing their students for the difficulties they will encounter. Unfortunately, they focus on the wrong problems. The curricula they design and the styles of education they envisage are badly suited to the serious perils of the future.

Ever since Margaret Thatcher decided that learning is another commodity to be traded in a minimally regulated market, since Seoul National University carried out an ambitious building program in which numerous large buildings devoted to applied sciences and engineering dwarf the single structure devoted to the humanities and social sciences, and since the most enlightened American president of the past half century declared that students need more Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics, large segments of liberal education have been hacked away, in the interests of training a workforce capable of competing in the global economy. Music, visual art, foreign languages, literature, philosophy, anthropology, and even history are declared irrelevant. They must make way for cutting-edge sciences (especially molecular biology and computer science), and for subjects relevant to the marketplace (finance, business studies.) Adieu Monet, Ade Beethoven, Farewell Shakespeare – hello fashion studies and video game design.

Many of the most eloquent writers on education, from Rousseau, Mill, and DuBois to Martha Nussbaum and Harry Brighouse, deplore this educational trend (Nussbaum 1997, 2010; Brighouse 2006). They regard the subjugation of education to alleged economic constraints as neglecting two of the most important educational goals: the development of the person, and the shaping of the citizen. I sympathize, and, elsewhere, I have joined the supporting chorus (Kitcher 2021). My complaint in what follows, however, will not take the standard form of demonstrating that Thatcherite training is a recipe for stunted development. Instead, I shall argue for attending to challenges that are all too frequently overlooked in educational contexts. If “relevance” is the watchword for the trend to which I have pointed, it would be a good idea to take a careful look at the full range of difficulties the young people of today will have to face. The blinkered and myopic idea that they must be shaped to compete in a global economy exhibiting unfettered capitalism, should be replaced by a more serious account of *all* the challenges the coming decades will bring.

Indeed, as we shall discover, the partial vision of Thatcherite reformers subverts the most significant aims of “relevant” education. The problem is not simply that the envisaged goals *neglect*

preparation for important challenges. The problem is that achieving those goals would make the hardest problems our descendants will face more intractable than they otherwise would be. If you are bent on relevance, concerned to arm the young for the most taxing struggles to come, you would be ill-advised to pursue the kinds of education the Thatcherites favor.

To see this, we need to understand the threats to which a “relevant” education – one focused on subjects with technological and commercial promise – would be a reasonable response, to consider the vulnerabilities caused by that response, and to recognize the dangers created for our descendants.

### Global Competition

In the early 1990s, when I was asked by the Library of Congress to prepare a report on the ethical and social implications of the Human Genome Project, I was surprised by the conception of that venture then prevalent in Washington. I was not so naïve as to believe that members of Congress (and their staff, the people with whom I had most contact) were thrilled by the thought of “reading the Book of Life” or “deciphering the Code of Codes.” I did expect, however, that their support for the HGP centered on the prospect of cures for hereditary diseases, many of them devastating. I was mistaken. Again and again, I heard the same enthusiastic prediction. “Our leading role in biotechnology will keep us ahead of the Japanese.” (Then, as now, East Asia was the home of perceived threat to American business, although the exact location was different.)

Nor does contemporary enthusiasm for STEM, and similar initiatives, express Darwin’s thought that “there is grandeur in this view of life” and that all children deserve to gain appreciation of the splendid vision. The point of requiring chemistry and encouraging business majors is to generate winners in an international competition, people who will make the next breakthroughs to advance technology or find new techniques for selling. The bottom line of education is ... the bottom line.

Nobody thinks, of course, that more than a tiny fraction of those who are taught the “relevant” subjects will be the pioneers who maintain the economic strength of the nation. The net must be cast wide in order to catch all of the sparsely distributed big fish. A somewhat larger, but still small, percentage of the young will be able to participate as helpers, serving as technical laborers of the Next Big Idea. The vast majority will make no use of whatever has been dinned into them in their classes in science or commerce. They will have to find a different niche in the labor market.

It is, oddly, a debased version of a Nietzschean vision. The “free spirits” are the captains of industry, no longer dancing on the mountaintops, but commanding the world from their gilded mansions. The “herd,” however, are as faceless and as unnoticed as they always have been.

Except, of course, that communications technology has transformed their predicament. Even in the age of the telegraph or of the telephone, labor economists could assume that successful new ventures might yield a “liberal reward of labor,” providing decent pay and working conditions for the brilliant entrepreneur’s fellow citizens. Today, production can be outsourced, carried on in parts of the world where workers are sufficiently desperate to accept subsistence wages and to toil for long hours in cramped spaces. Coupled to increasing possibilities of automation, the trend is already transforming human labor. The remaining jobs for the many students whose prowess in the “relevant” subjects falls below the top level will be those resisting exportation and automation – primarily positions involving human contact.

Perhaps such positions might require a different set of skills, refined by a different style of education? Whether or not that is so, the emphasis on finding all the (scarce) Business Leaders of the Future tells against deviating from the plan. Although some service jobs are intrinsically satisfying – most teachers are not “in it for the money,” and receptionists, nurses, flight attendants and gardeners all find satisfaction in what they do (Autor & Kitcher 2018) – the stereotype of service work regards it as second-rate, menial, “unproductive labor.” Under the pressures of no-holds-barred capitalism, many nations are erasing any line dividing service workers from servants. What servants need from education is not any refinement of empathy or of social skills. They simply have to know their place.

I have sketched (broadly and somewhat crudely) the contours of a world in which educational policy is obsessed with the demand to identify and train the people who can become contenders in a ruthless global economy. Any world like that is likely to exhibit some familiar features.

- 1 Large and increasing economic inequality, among nations and within nations.
- 2 A sense that what is important in life is amassing material possessions, either for their own intrinsic value or for enjoying the power to display one's wealth.
- 3 Declining concern for public goods, especially those that benefit the poor.
- 4 Growing discontent among many segments of the population, as people see themselves as having been deprived of the opportunities available to earlier generations, as being "left behind."
- 5 The withering of many forms of community, and the breakdown of social solidarity.

My list is ordered, with the aspects of contemporary life most closely connected with the current version of capitalism at the beginning, and the links becoming less direct as it proceeds. In principle, it might be possible to avoid the later pathologies in democratic societies where the citizens were able to identify where their interests lie. In practice, nations that advertise themselves as democracies have often commodified the transmission of information (so that many of their citizens are profoundly misinformed) and the education provided for the young does not equip them to reflect critically on their predicament. The result is one of the great ironies of "democracy" as it exists today. In the act through which they are supposed to express their political freedom, voters frequently select candidates and policies diametrically opposed to their central goals and desires.

A discussion of the educational trend of the past four decades should ask two questions: If the policy of emphasizing subjects with technological and commercial relevance is pursued, how can societies avoid the features on my list? Is a world with those features one that we want for our children and grandchildren? Contemporary economists have provided excellent analyses of the problems with unfettered capitalism, thereby showing how difficult it is to answer the first question positively (Atkinson 2015; Case & Deaton 2020; Deaton 2013; Stiglitz 2002, 2012, 2019). Many of the most distinguished recent contributions to the philosophy of education have argued for visions of human life and of human societies supporting a negative answer to the second (Brighouse 2006; Delbanco 2012; Nussbaum 2010). I shall add a further complaint. A world with the socioeconomic features I have listed is disastrously ill-prepared to meet challenges any rational, well-informed person should expect – challenges to our species that are as severe as any it has faced in recorded history.

### **The Real Problems**

Falling into poverty is a bad thing. So, if technological innovation and business acumen are viewed as defenses against that outcome, it is no wonder they are prized. Yet human material well-being can be affected by factors quite independent of the character of economic life. Environmental catastrophes have a way of subverting production, even when the social conditions have been honed to ideal efficiency. At this stage of the twenty-first century, nobody should be surprised at the "news" of increasing rates of environmental catastrophe in the coming decades.

Two kinds of coming catastrophes are evident. At a time when all nations are grappling with a pandemic, the long-neglected message issued by Laurie Garrett in the 1990s (Garrett 1994) can no longer be ignored. More generally, the predicted (even the presently achieved) elevation of the Earth's mean temperature above pre-industrial levels will bring increasing rates of dangerous heatwaves, prolonged droughts, raging wildfires, monsoons and storms causing destructive floods, human migration on an unprecedented scale – and vastly expanded opportunities for the evolution of disease vectors and for existing infectious agents to jump from non-human organisms to our own

species. Thus, the two types of catastrophe are not completely independent. Some future plagues will occur without any contribution from global heating (as COVID-19 apparently did); others will be side effects of changes in ecological relations.

Until relatively recently, future environmental threats have often been characterized in terms of single changes: the average sea-level in a particular location will rise by such-and-such an amount. While predictions of this form are useful for certain kinds of planning – they can be used, for example, in decision-making about whether a particular area should be resettled – concentrating on them underestimates the severity of the challenges future decades (and centuries) will bring. Often, what matters isn't an average, but the tail of a distribution. Regions vulnerable to rapidly spreading wildfires will be less affected by the mean value of the local temperature than by the frequency of days in which extremely high temperatures occur. Yet, even thinking in terms of isolated episodes sells the danger short. Our focus should be on the probabilities of cascades of effects (Wallace-Wells 2019).

Thus, in considering infectious disease, the intensity of the challenge is not determined by the course of the initial outbreak. As has become very clear, much depends on whether the first wave of infections can be confined, on whether the infectious agent can mutate fast enough to evade existing treatments and methods of prevention, on whether the course of its evolution attenuates the damaging effects or augments them. Nor can the harmful consequences be measured simply in terms of mortality rates, even if they are supplemented by considering long-term effects on survivors. Efforts to respond to epidemics or pandemics often interfere with patterns of behavior, disrupting work and radically lowering productivity, disturbing the education of the young, preventing the elderly and the sick from receiving the care they need, and so forth. Indirect consequences of a plague can shape the destiny of a nation (or a region) and even the career of a religion (McNeill 1976; Stark 1996).

These points are amplified in the case of climate change. The climate agreement reached in Paris in 2015 imposed minimal obligations on the signatories. Since then, very few nations are on course to reach (or approximate) the targets set. Unless far more stringent programs for reducing emissions are introduced, and far greater compliance shown, it is virtually certain that areas of the world, currently inhabited by a billion people, will become uninhabitable by mid-century. The immediate consequence will be displacement of a very large number of people. They will not be driving serenely to more hospitable destinations. With very high probability, they will have limited supplies of food and fresh water, their chances of practicing the most elementary forms of hygiene will be very low, and they will attempt to travel through areas occupied by other groups (with whom there is often a history of tensions) who are themselves struggling. Human migration at levels orders of magnitude less than what we can expect has already caused enormous human suffering and generated political conflicts. How will nations – both desperate nomads and their intended hosts – cope when the numbers of the homeless mount into the tens, or even hundreds, of millions?

On every continent, an overheated planet will witness cascades of disruptive effects. This month's wildfires succeed last month's floods; the latest wave of migrants spread disease; battles over water sources escalate into full-scale warfare. It is no exaggeration to suppose that, by later in this century, every nation will have to devote a significant portion of its resources to mopping up after recurrent disasters. Pride in the ability to outmuscle others in the global marketplace will have to be tempered by recognition of the repeated shocks to the national economy.

Perhaps, instead of concentrating on building up the muscles of the most talented few, it might be worth considering how education might help *all* those whom these predictable cascades will challenge to come to terms with their perilous world?

### **Doubts about Democracy**

From ancient times to the present, many commentators have agreed that democracy is messy, and some have concluded that it is dangerous. Whether the trouble is supposed to lie in the native

unintelligence of the masses, or whether it is the product of their ignorance, the expected result is the same. Democracies will fail to identify threats in time to avert them, or even to manage them. Eventually, the populace will yearn for a wise and capable leader who can preserve whatever they have been able to retain. A strongman answers the call. Whether this improves the situation is, as Winston Churchill famously reminded the world, somewhat dubious.

With respect to the challenges posed by infectious disease and by the recurrent catastrophes of a humanly-overheated world, the reasons to distrust democracy are abundantly clear. Several of the most distinguished commentators on the slow and often-interrupted efforts to limit global heating despair of the prospects of any democratic society coming close to doing what is necessary. “We know how to steer the world to a bearable future,” they tell us, “but our politicians lack the will to lead a reluctant electorate. If it were only seen as a purely administrative matter, all would be well. Each nation would delegate absolute authority to a manager, who would organize the transition to a sustainable world.”<sup>1</sup> Perhaps in line with Plato’s *Republic*, the envisaged managers are assumed to have been shown the Form of the Good. Sadly, however, the autocrats available in the contemporary world – and there is no longer a small sample of them – don’t exhibit either the wisdom or the incorruptibility that Plato required of Guardians.

A century ago, a thoughtful American, surveying the many ill-conceived policies favored by the electorate of his nation, argued that contemporary societies were simply too complex to leave the choice of leaders to the masses. Walter Lippmann exposed the myth of the “omnicompetent citizen,” a character sufficiently intelligent and well-informed, and equipped with enough free time to work through the major issues of the day, and to arrive at well-grounded opinions reflecting that individual’s personal interests and values (Lippmann 1925/2017). Since approximations to that imaginary voter do not exist, he concluded, government should be left to experts.

Lippmann’s recommendation will hardly do for the contemporary world. The lack of consensus on expertise is a commonplace of our times, and, in badly polarized nations, any anointed leader, allegedly qualified to steer the ship of state, would strike a significant portion of the populace as introducing a new form of tyranny. Indeed, in most of the nations primarily responsible for the emissions driving the planet to its overheated condition, instituting a climate czar with the power to make the needed changes would arouse the violent opposition of a majority of citizens. In many instances, a *large* majority.

So, what is to be done?

### Deepening Democracy

Lippmann’s analysis of his times sparked one of the most sophisticated public debates in the history of the United States (and, perhaps, of any nation.) America’s premier philosopher, John Dewey, took up the cudgels on behalf of democracy. The remedy, he suggested, was not to abandon democracy, but to deepen it.

Dewey is most famous for a book he published roughly a decade before his exchange with Lippmann. *Democracy and Education* is one of the classics of the philosophy of education, although I believe its deep message has not been fully appreciated. The conjunction of the title is easily read as pointing to something Dewey firmly believed: one goal of education is to produce young people ready to participate in democratic life. All too often, however, those who claim to follow Dewey take a further step. They interpret preparation for citizenship in a narrow way, as emphasizing the role of “civic education” in the curriculum. (Dewey frequently rails vehemently against the idea that “teaching the civics” is central to education.) The importance of the title’s juxtaposition lies elsewhere – in an insightful conception of democracy.

The surface of democratic life displays the elections and the voting often regarded as sufficient for democracy to take hold. Deeper analysts of democracy would point to the constitutional

protections, to the freedoms assured to citizens, and to the role of free exchange of ideas in helping voters align their electoral choices with their interests. Dewey, however, takes a further step: democracy, he contends, “is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience” (Dewey 1916/1975: 93). The title of his seminal book was chosen to express a striking and apparently bizarre claim. *Democracy is Education*.

Instead of starting with the organization of a nation-state, Dewey recognizes democracy as existing at many scales. Families, small towns, boards for housing developments, sports teams, orchestras, and large numbers of other groups joined in some common venture can proceed democratically – or they can be administered by some individual (or body of individuals) whose decisions are always law. When we attend to the smaller scales (as in my list of examples), the tendency to emphasize voting diminishes. More important are processes in which opinions are expressed, negotiations conducted, and minds changed. Autocratic families still exist (unfortunately), but, in many parts of the world, most people would be horrified by a return to the convention that the “head” of the family has absolute authority. Moreover, a family in which decisions were taken by assembling the members, presenting the options, and proceeding immediately to a vote would appear only slightly less perverse. In family councils, we expect people to present their points of view, we anticipate that others will listen, that there will be attempts to see the situation through one another’s eyes, and that the eventual outcome will be one that each member can live with. If, after lengthy discussion, the process ends with one party discontented, that is a matter for regret.

Like Tocqueville before him, Dewey saw this kind of democracy as important not only for families but at larger scales as well. New England Town meetings were almost certainly not ideal versions of democratic exchange, but both theorists viewed them as exemplifying an important element in democracy: the need for *mutual learning* and decisions framed on the basis of *mutual engagement*. The democratic citizen is committed to living and working with others. At the core of democracy is a felt solidarity with one’s fellows. Because of that solidarity, coming to appreciate their perspectives isn’t simply discovering what *they* want, how *they* view things. Rather it is a process through which those who listen improve their own initial inclinations, coming to recognize what *they themselves* most fundamentally desire. Democratic exchange aims at the construction of a “conjoint experience,” one in which the individual selves unite to form a “we.”

So far, I have attempted to make vivid the guiding idea behind Dewey’s provocative thesis. Let me now try to elaborate it more precisely. A *decision situation* arises when some group of people faces alternatives for going on, and the group is divided with respect to which option should be preferred. The *scale* of the decision situation is determined by the size of the set of *stakeholders*, the people whose lives will be affected by the selection of one of the options. Direct participation is possible when the scale is relatively small, when all the stakeholders can come together and exchange their perspectives on the situation. When that is not possible, democratic exchange must be carried on by representatives. Representation is fine-grained when each difference among perspectives that the stakeholders would acknowledge receives its own representative; it is coarse-grained when the perspectives are so numerous that some of them must be lumped together. When that occurs, the ranges of variation covered by the representatives should be approximately equal.

A group counts as a democracy when it is committed to resolving decision situations through democratic exchange. When a decision situation arises, the option chosen is determined by a deliberation meeting three conditions:

*Inclusion.* Every stakeholder’s perspective is represented. Only the perspectives of stakeholders are represented. The representation is at the finest grain feasible in the situation.

*Information.* Participants only appeal to statements that are well-supported by the available evidence.

*Engagement.* Each participant attempts to make others vividly aware of the perspectives that participant represents. Those who listen attempt to enter in to the perspectives of the others. Each participant seeks an outcome all can tolerate.

Although much could be said about these conditions, I shall restrict myself to the most essential clarifications. These affect the *Information* and *Engagement* conditions.

Many attempts at deliberation break down because those involved are allowed to make assertions, with which others disagree, without any evidence for the controversial statements. The *Information* condition disallows this. Speakers are not allowed to be dogmatic – there are no “conversation-stoppers.” Yet, as I have already noted, disagreement can extend to what counts as evidence for a claim. When that occurs, participants in democratic exchange must work together to probe the inferences and premises advanced by rival parties. They have to expose fallacious reasoning, and to work together to determine reliable canons of investigation. Here, too, mutual engagement is important. All too often in today’s discussions, people cling to a position because they fear the consequences of relinquishing it. “If *that* becomes widely accepted, the impact on my life will be severe”, they – reasonably – claim. Philosophers have frequently supposed that, when complex issues, involving both facts and values, are at stake, the appropriate procedure is to settle the facts first, and then approach issues of value on the basis of a shared conception of the facts. This is an impoverished picture. In any joint deliberation in which people have to undertake inquiry together, one commitment must be in place from the start: nobody is to be left vulnerable in light of the final decision. Whatever becomes widely accepted, there will be protections for the lives of those who might be adversely affected. Why would anyone agree to joint deliberation with people who refused to offer such guarantees?

Mutual engagement requires a willingness to see the world from the viewpoint of each of those who have a stake in the issue. On the basis of those vicarious experiences, deliberators must actively seek a way of satisfying at least some of the central aspirations of each perspective. It may be achieved through compromise as typically understood: the option chosen takes the views with which participants enter the discussion and stitches together parts from each. Deliberators should also appreciate the possibility of a different approach. Through the process in which ideas are exchanged, they should seek new ways of conceptualizing the situation from which their deliberation has sprung, endeavoring to find a hitherto unoccupied viewpoint that will accommodate the wishes of all, as they have evolved in the course of the sequence of mutual identifications. The emergent consensus may be viewed, by each participant, as inferior to the preference voiced at the beginning of the proceedings. What counts is that all find it acceptable.

If no solution of this form can be found, mutually engaged discussions can try for a weaker form of agreement. The latest debate about what is to be done belongs to a long sequence. History matters. Deliberators can attend to the ways in which past decisions have affected various groups, and, when they cannot identify an outcome acceptable to all, they can try for a record of decision-making with which each of the parties can live. Solidarity can be preserved by ensuring that no segment of society feels permanently marginalized.

All three of the conditions are *ideals* – and thus may be dismissed as utopian. “How,” a skeptic may ask, “could actual societies ever engage in conversations meeting these standards, or even approximating them?” The question misunderstands the usefulness of ideals, as pragmatists often conceive them. To be sure, there are ideals people sometimes reasonably aim to realize. There are, however, many others – including inconsistent sets of ideals – that prove valuable in diagnosing the shortcomings of a present situation, and thus marking a direction in which a group of people (or a whole society) might make progress. Besides *progress to* (teleological progress) there is also *progress from* (pragmatic progress), achieved by recognizing some features of the current predicament as problematic, and, wholly or partly, amending it (Kitcher 2017). So, the three conditions point to the



ills of actual conversations about important and difficult questions. Those conversations often fail to include the perspectives of all those who have a stake in the issue. They are frequently full of falsehoods, inaccuracies, and unsupported claims, sometimes dominated by blunt dogmatism. Above all, they rarely exhibit efforts at sensitive listening, serious attempts to understand what worries those who disagree with us, to enter into their approach to the world, and to feel its impacts through their skins. As pragmatists concede, perfection along any of these three dimensions is humanly impossible. The concession doesn't doom efforts to make deliberations *more* inclusive, *better* informed, and *more deeply* engaged than they currently are.

A progressive Deweyan democracy is a society that, besides exhibiting the machinery of free elections and the standard constitutional protections, institutionalizes processes of deliberation on major issues of policy and aims to make those discussions more inclusive, more informed, and more mutually engaged than they have previously been.

### Revisiting the Doubts

The outlined account of “Deweyan democracy” offers my reading of Dewey's own response to Lippmann's abstract doubts.<sup>2</sup> Their debate focused on a general question. How can a democratic society, one with many policy issues to decide, and containing divergent views on a significant fraction of those issues, arrive at policies representing the “will of the people”? No specific question occupied Dewey and Lippmann. Hence, presenting a recipe for a more deeply democratic society, one that might emerge given world enough and time, was sufficient to address Lippmann's central complaint.

Our situation is different. The environmental threats are *urgent*, and they take very specific forms. Deepening democracy might be a good thing to do. But is it relevant to the challenges I have hailed as the principal problems for our descendants?

With respect both to infectious disease and to global heating, future generations will be aided by whatever we can do to mitigate the coming dangers and by whatever is done to help them adapt to the harsher circumstances in which they will live. At present, as climate scientists have tirelessly pointed out, the world is doing far too little on either score. Could a commitment to Deweyan democracy improve the situation?

Diagnosis first. Let's ask what currently inhibits climate action of the required intensity. The trouble stems from a four-sided dilemma (or, more pedantically, a quadrilemma).<sup>3</sup> The following desirable outcomes are difficult to achieve together:

- 1 A relatively benign future human environment
- 2 Not worsening the lives of those who already live precariously
- 3 Not preventing the economic development for which poorer nations yearn
- 4 Preserving the main achievements (social and cultural) of the human past.

Different constituencies within the human population emphasize the value of these outcomes more or less heavily. Many young people, concerned about the world they will inherit, urge rapid action to limit emissions of greenhouse gases. Those who have not yet chosen their socioeconomic trajectories – and who do not have a stake in the continued possibility of particular types of work – are less afraid of potential disruptions. The poor, including those who live in affluent societies, are alarmed when they consider the sweeping changes to energy production, worrying that their already precarious lives will become even more difficult. Developing nations regard the principal emitters of the past (and of the present – *plus ça change*) as having wantonly created an environmental mess, while demanding that developing countries pay the price by limiting their own economic development. Finally, many people, from many cultures and social strata, are concerned that valuable achievements will be sacrificed, either in efforts to limit global heating, or as a result of the catastrophes to come.

Without a proposal for balancing these goals, one that all the diverse constituencies can live with, efforts to mitigate climate change are doomed to failure. The pattern of past negotiations among nations, as they have determined the “emissions reduction targets” at which each should aim, exemplifies the problem. Giving priority to their competitive position in the cutthroat global economy, each nation is anxious not to emerge from the transition to a sustainable environment and find themselves disadvantaged. Thus, any commitments to reforming their generation of energy are inevitably too little and too late. Further, as the Paris agreement teaches us, the inadequate commitments are unlikely to be kept.

Within countries, political leaders are compelled to appease electors whose sense of their own vulnerability inclines them to resist the radical changes climate activists (rightly) recommend as necessary to avert a harsh future environment. Contemporary global capitalism has eroded the forms of support on offer in the heyday of welfare states, and simultaneously, greatly increased the proportion of the populace whose lives are precarious. In consequence, the foolish and dangerous practice of subsidizing traditional energy sources continues, even as the use of fossil fuels becomes more expensive than a switch to renewable forms of energy.

Once the structure of the problem is exposed, the answer seems evident. What the world needs is a way of reconciling conflicting demands, one a diverse human population will accept as an acceptable way to go on. Or, more exactly, an ongoing process of negotiating the balance – as new occurrences affect the chances of satisfying the four different aspirations, and as new information clarifies the future trajectories of those chances – in which the interests of all will be represented, and in which there will be a genuine effort not to sacrifice any constituency.

In short, the road to successful mitigation of global heating lies through Deweyan democracy – on an international scale.

### Skepticism Renewed

Traveling that road, however, would require more time than we have. At least, so skeptics think. Moreover, when we reflect on the periodic meetings among national leaders, and the disappointments they regularly generate, it seems there are grounds for skepticism. No magic wand exists to transform the character of the discussions, turning the participants into the deliberators Deweyan democracy celebrates. The first two conditions on the conversation do not seem particularly troublesome. Many (but not all) of the discussions are inclusive, and, for the most part, participants are well-informed. True, there’s a pronounced tendency to base premises on ideology – in this instance, economic dogma. Progress might begin by suspending the faith and considering alternatives to rapacious hyper-competitiveness.

The root of the problem is the third condition. Mutual engagement is virtually non-existent. National leaders listen to their peers with a simple goal in mind: How can their comprehension of the perspectives of others be used to arrive at an outcome advancing their own ends? To resolve the quadrilemma, more than that is required. Instrumental listening must give way to something more empathetic, an openness that no longer treats the other participants as mere means.

So, skeptics draw the sorry conclusion. Place the same people in the same situation as often as you like. They will always fall dismally short of their loveable – but fictitious – Deweyan counterparts. *Perhaps* an advance might be made if education were reoriented, aimed toward instilling the virtues so conspicuously lacking in our non-Deweyan exchanges. But, even if educators came up, today, with a good plan for doing that, it would take at least a generation. And that much time isn’t available.

Although it’s a powerful case, the argument isn’t decisive. Education, as Dewey often reminded his readers, isn’t finished when the learner leaves school. An old dog sometimes learns new tricks. If my diagnosis of the failures of climate activism were to be widely accepted, the participants in future

deliberations might take serious steps toward emulating the Deweyan discussants. Moreover, as the effects of past insouciance about global heating become ever more apparent – in the parade of floods and wildfires and heatwaves and droughts – national leaders may be encouraged to seek a diagnosis. The hold of economic ideology may die hard, attentive and other-directed listening may be far from perfect. Nevertheless, adults are often able to amend their conduct when they are told about the conventions governing a particular social interaction. Amateur clowns do not tell jokes at funerals.

Some directed efforts at fostering engaged conversation are encouraging. At a range of levels, people have been able to work together to achieve greater harmony. James Fishkin and his co-workers have attained some successes with respect to a variety of groups on a variety of issues (Fishkin 2010); more relevant to the present discussion is the French citizens' convention on climate change, insightfully analyzed by H el ene Landemore (Landemore ms.).

Finally, even if advances are slow, climate science recognizes the costs, *at any stage*, of failing to reform our ways of generating energy. If the process only begins a generation from now, the world our great-grandchildren inhabit will be very bad. But, if it doesn't begin then, it will be even worse. It's never too late to mitigate.

### Really Relevant Education

Mitigation is only half the story. The world's children must be taught the skills required for adaptation to a world in which environmental challenges recur. What they will primarily need is an ability to work together, to combine their forces and resources to blunt the damage inflicted here, there, and everywhere. Given the likely perils of the future, the strategy of seeking entrepreneurs who will deliver the Next Technological Gizmo for the Next Popular Fad will be the subject of morose sick jokes.

I have elsewhere suggested a program of education conducive to the solidarity Deweyan democracy demands (Kitcher 2021). It starts early, with exercises in joint planning in which all pre-school children engage. As they grow, the exercises become ever more complex and more challenging. The instilling of skills in including others, critically evaluating evidence, and, above all, in serious and empathetic listening is accompanied and fostered by an interactive course of study, in the humanities and social sciences, aimed at cultivating self-understanding and appreciating the lives – and the aspirations – of a diverse human population. Nor is this to be confined to the early years. Preparing and extending solidarity takes a lifetime.

There's an obvious challenge to the points I have been making. "Technology has the power to liberate us from the quadrilemma. Geoengineering will dissolve the problem." Yet we should ask some questions. Would the chances of success be increased by a neo-Thatcherite program, discarding the emphasis on "market skills," and even replacing the quest for nifty devices to boost national productivity with a search for people who could solve a very specific problem? Would that work better than investing in a cooperative effort to bring together leading scientists, established as well as newly minted, with interest in the problem, and a diverse array of backgrounds?

Affirmative answers are, I think, mere speculations. Even optimists, though, should worry about a third question. Would a technological breakthrough be sufficient? For to *implement* the conjectural advance, different factions within countries (as well as the nations of the world) will have to work together. Here, the recent course of the COVID pandemic points a clear moral. The breakthrough, in this instance, was easy and predictable. Thanks to a well-established body of science – molecular biology and virology were ready for application<sup>4</sup> – vaccines have been produced with astounding speed. We have been given the Holy Grail. Nevertheless, infection surges on, as the cup is withheld, or spilled, or simply refused. Without serious attention to the goal of educating citizens – ideally, citizens of the world – the power of any technology to do good will always be needlessly limited.

The generations who come after us will almost certainly be challenged by the physical environment negligent ancestors have bequeathed to them. They will need to recognize what is worth conserving, and what can be dispensed with. To the extent that they acquire that discriminatory ability, they will almost certainly wonder why their careless forebears placed so much emphasis on meaningless toys, and lost sight of so many things that matter. If they exercise the virtues that I hope they have learned, sadness will temper their justifiable anger.

Traditional liberal education is an important part of Really Relevant Education because, when it is developed sensitively, with attention to each individual child, it can induce an understanding of what is worth pursuing. As the people who will come after us struggle to decide what must be given up and what retained, they will benefit from abilities to reflect on what matters most to them. Because their conclusions will probably vary, they too will have to negotiate an acceptable balance. Despite the shocks they repeatedly experience, if they are able to carry out those negotiations – if they are able to make progress as Deweyan democrats – their lives may even go better than ours.

Since 1789, the banner words of the French Revolutionaries have been reduced to a pair. “Liberty” and “Equality” feature centrally in our socio-political discussions. “Fraternity” – or, better, its more general cousin, “Solidarity” – has dropped out of the picture.<sup>5</sup> It’s a genuine loss. For solidarity is crucial to the best development we can achieve of liberty and equality.

Really Relevant Education would make it central once again. In doing so, it would expose the educational trend of the past forty years for the grotesque parody it is.<sup>6</sup>

(Related Chapters: 2, 3, 20, 21, 25, 27, 29, 34.)

## Notes

- 1 Sophisticated elaborations of this line of thought were offered by the economist, Jeffrey Sachs, and the philosopher, Dale Jamieson, at a workshop at Columbia University in December 2018.
- 2 The response tries to make more exact the notion of solidarity underlying Dewey’s appeal for “the great Community” (Dewey 1927/1984).
- 3 This diagnosis of the difficulties of climate action is elaborated and defended in Kitcher and Keller (2017).
- 4 One of the odd quirks of history is the continuity between the 20th century pandemic and its 21st century counterpart. Molecular biology began in 1944 with the identification of DNA as the genetic material, a discovery made by Oswald Avery and two colleagues. As John Barry’s illuminating historical study makes clear, Avery was a leading figure in the attempts (ultimately unsuccessful) to find a medical solution to “the Spanish flu” (Barry 2004). His decades of dedicated work later launched a discipline that has paid off handsomely in our own times.
- 5 Although some philosophers interested in education have tried to reintroduce it. See Callan (1997); Curren and Elenbaas (2020).
- 6 Many thanks to Randy Curren for his characteristically astute advice on an earlier draft.

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