



# Dewey on Democracy

*William R. Caspary*

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## **Dewey on Democracy** William R. Caspary

Revived appreciation of John Dewey as an inspirational advocate of participatory democracy has been tempered by criticism that he lacks a concrete political program. William R. Caspary makes the case for Dewey as a more discerning and challenging political theorist than this. Caspary draws from Dewey's extensive writings a concrete politics of participatory democracy, solving classic dilemmas confronting both democratic theorists and citizen activists. He compares Dewey's views with the full range of approaches in contemporary democratic theory and explores the underpinnings of Dewey's political theory by offering a thorough and innovative account of his philosophy of science, social science, and ethics.

In Dewey's democratic theory, conflict is an inescapable condition of politics, according to Caspary, and is also an essential stimulus for the advancement of individuals and societies. Recognizing the centrality of conflict, Caspary claims, Dewey makes conflict resolution an overarching concept in his theory of democracy. Caspary argues that conflict resolution is central to Dewey's philosophy of ethics and of science. Caspary--a scholar with many years of experience as a social movement activist, ombudsperson, and mediator--traces this conflict resolution orientation throughout Dewey's writings.

Caspary brings Dewey's abstract theories down to earth with examples from present-day social and political experiments, including progressive educational experiments, common-ground dialogues on abortion, the South African program for truth and reconciliation, and worker self-management cooperatives. These cases illustrate Dewey's linking of political action, social experimentation, and public discourse. They pin down specific meanings for Dewey's sometimes vague political maxims, and suggest workable programs. Throughout Caspary demonstrates the courage and vision of Dewey's unwavering commitment to participatory democracy.

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