Eloquent in its silence, the rubble of the Berlin Wall demonstrates that political identities and oppositions fashioned during the Cold War are no longer equal to late—twentieth-century actualities. No longer can we so neatly divide the world into free and unfree regimes, and so no longer can we determine who we are simply by pointing to who we are not. As events outstrip mind's accustomed resources, we are reminded that the aim of thinking is not to mirror a finished reality but to anticipate the possibilities disclosed by affairs still very much in the making.

Witnessing the emergence (and sometimes the suppression) of popular reform movements in China, the Soviet Union, South Korea, the Philippines, Poland, and other unexpected places, we may be tempted to discount the novelty of the present moment by assimilating it to the past. We may be inclined, following Francis Fukuyama, to conclude that what we now behold is "the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government." Yet is it possible that this self-congratulatory conclusion prematurely resolves the import of our cur-

<sup>1.</sup> Francis Fukuyama, "The End of History?" National Interest 16 (Summer 1989), 4.

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rent situation? If we were to check our desire to fix the meaning of the present, might we secure a richer apprehension of its ambiguous admixture of promise and peril? Might we, for example, speculate that adequate appreciation of the claims of democracy becomes most difficult when parliamentary institutions and civil liberties are (at least formally) endorsed without exception? Might it be that the term "democracy" loses its power to question what is when we all come to call ourselves democrats?

When the sense of the past slips away but the contours of the new remain equivocal, the time is ripe for fresh demarcation of the meanings in terms of which future conflicts will be fought. This book is animated by the perhaps naïve hope that we are now entering a crucial period of struggle over what democracy means. Those who identify democracy's import with specified institutional forms, as does Fukuyama, forget that their existence is compatible with that of profoundly antidemocratic cultures. The defining structures of contemporary Western societies—the corporation, the research university, the bureaucratic state, the mass media, and so forth—are to a greater or lesser extent inegalitarian, unaccountable, and exploitative. Consequently, the task for the democrat today is to inquire into the meaning of that paradoxical situation in which the superficial triumph of democracy excuses our failure to attend to its deeper bidding.

For reasons I explain in this book, I do not think that such an inquiry can be accomplished without at the same time engaging in a genealogical examination of the complex history out of which our received account of reason has emerged. The adjective "democratic" refers to a qualitatively unique form of specifically political experience. Any effort to foster such experience presupposes an exploration into what frustrates its realization; what chiefly does so now are the institutionalized embodiments of what I call a teleocratic conception of reason. That conception, whose roots I trace to the city-state of classical Greece, holds that everyday experience must be deemed insufficient or unreal as long as it remains insubordinate in the face of reason's rule. Redemption of the cause of ordinary embodied experience is indispensable, therefore, if the term "democracy" is to be available for purposes other than describing accomplished fact.

I was initially persuaded to ask whether the claims of democracy and those of a teleocratic conception of reason might stand in inverse relationship to each other by reading the work of John Dewey, and, although my thinking has been shaped by many others, Dewey stands as the principal source of inspiration for this book. Yet aside from this

preface and the introductory chapter that follows, I make very few explicit references to Dewey or to the philosophical school to which he putatively belongs. Why?

This book is not *about* Dewey, and it is not *about* pragmatism. I am persuaded that Dewey's writings suggest original ways of thinking about the relationship between reason and experience, and that these ways are worthy of exploration by those who deem it important to reflect on the current state of democratic politics. I do not, however, believe that Dewey's work furnishes a set of determinate meanings that we can know without at the same time transforming what is known. To hold otherwise is, wittingly or no, to endorse one of the key dualisms against which those calling themselves "pragmatists" have long railed. Specifically, it is to affirm the existence of an unequivocal disjunction between reader and that which is read; and it is to construe reading as an activity through which the precisely demarcated subject that is the reader secures an equally precise representation of its circumscribed object.

For reasons I explicate throughout this work, this formulation does not do justice to the experience of fashioning sense from what at first appears unfamiliar. In an autobiographical statement composed in 1930, Dewey wrote: "I seem to be unstable, chameleon-like, yielding one after another to many diverse and even incompatible influences; struggling to assimilate something from each and yet striving to carry it forward in a way that is logically consistent with what has been learned from its predecessors."2 Although the activity of making sense can be decomposed into its constitutive elements for analytic purposes, its experienced reality is always one in which knower and known are continuously engaged in creation and re-creation of each other. To forget that meaning is engendered within the mutual relationship between these two essentially ambiguous creatures is to forget, quoting Dewey again, that "all discourse, oral or written, which is more than a routine unrolling of vocal habits, says things that surprise the one that says them."3 Thus any reader who seeks to craft sense from texts that caught their author off-guard is sure to beget meanings that are startling to both. To deny this possibility is to make certain that neither will pass beyond the superficial and so realize the significances of which each is capable.

Criticism of this work's arguments should therefore be predicated

<sup>2.</sup> Dewey, "From Absolutism to Experimentalism," in ENF, p. 13.

<sup>3.</sup> Dewey, EN, p. 194.

on grounds other than those of infidelity to a "Dewey" whose alleged existence is symptomatic of the rationalism Dewey sought to undermine. To forestall such criticism, however, is not to claim that what follows is simply the unsubstantiated invention of an autonomous ego. To counter any objectivist account of interpretation, it is best to emphasize the reader's contribution to the enterprise of making sense. But to counter its subjectivist counterpart, it is best to stress the contribution of what is to be read. Having already done the former, let me now do the latter.

Although I believe this book will prove comprehensible to those unfamiliar with Dewey's work, I will nonetheless offer a brief overview of the texts from which I have principally drawn. Just before World War I, Dewey became ever more disgruntled with the increasingly arcane questions vexing the increasingly professionalized discipline of philosophy. That dissatisfaction was given compressed expression in a 1917 essay titled "The Need for a Recovery of Philosophy." There, Dewey asserted that his aim was to "forward the emancipation of philosophy from too intimate and exclusive attachment to traditional problems. It is not in intent a criticism of various solutions that have been offered, but raises a question as to the genuineness, under the present conditions of science and social life, of the problems."4 To question the "genuineness" of philosophy's conventional problems is, by implication, to label those preoccupations "artificial" and so, by extension, to contest their appearance of reality. To make clear the sense in which such problems are insignificant, Dewey set to work articulating an ontology whose paradoxical purpose was to check philosophy's felt need for a theory of reality. Refusing to supply what all previous ontology had taken to be its essential end, Dewey declined the tradition's invitation to draw an invidious distinction between pure objects whose existence is guaranteed by being certainly known and those mundane things of everyday experience that cannot be so redeemed. "The chief characteristic trait of the pragmatic notion of reality is precisely that no theory of Reality in general, überhaupt, is possible or needed. It [pragmatism] occupies the position of an emancipated empiricism or a thoroughgoing naïve realism. It finds that 'reality' is a denotative term, a word used to designate indifferently everything that happens. Lies, dreams, insanities, deceptions, myths, theories are all of them just the events which they specifically are. Pragmatism takes

<sup>4.</sup> Dewey, "The Need for a Recovery of Philosophy," in ENF, p. 21.

its stand with daily life, which finds that such things really have to be reckoned with as they occur interwoven in the texture of events. The only way in which the term reality can become more than a blanket denotative term is through recourse to specific events in all their diversity and thatness."<sup>5</sup>

To restore some sense of the import of ordinary events, Dewey wrote his occasionally poetic and often obscure *Experience and Nature* (1929). That work sketched the outlines of what might be called a naturalized Hegelian historicism. Its largest aspiration was to rescue the category of experience, construed as an existential site of potential meaning, from denigration at the hands of a rationalistic philosophic tradition whose contempt for this world relegates its affairs to a shadowy realm of partial being. To this end, Dewey asked what shape the relationship between nature, experience, and meaning might assume if thinking were to take its cues not from received doctrine, but rather from the characteristic qualities of experience in gross, that is, from life as it is immediately lived by those unblessed with philosophic insight. "As against this common identification of reality with what is sure, regular and finished, experience in unsophisticated forms gives evidence of a different world and points to a different metaphysics." 6

To explore the genesis of the philosopher's turn away from unrefined experience, Dewey sometimes, as in Reconstruction in Philosophy (1920), trained his sights on the ancient Greek city-state. For the most part, however, his abiding concern was seventeenth- and eighteenthcentury reformulations of this classical inheritance. Within early epistemological writings, Dewey located sophisticated explications of the cultural forms coming to mark the condition of collective unhappiness known as modernity. Defined by its institutionalization of the tradition's oppressive disjunctions between mind and body, means and ends, art and labor, and the like, that condition was quickly eroding the capacity of ordinary undertakings to retain any sense of their unrationalized reality. In The Public and Its Problems (1927), accordingly, Dewey argued that recovery from the malady of pernicious dualism requires animation of the cause of democratic association. For only that mode of human relatedness adequately respects and celebrates the meaning-bearing possibilities of everyday life. (This work, I might note in passing, does not succeed very well in developing the specifi-

<sup>5.</sup> Ibid., p. 59.

<sup>6.</sup> Dewey, EN, p. 47.

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cally political dimensions of the ontology articulated in *Experience and Nature*. Hence, on one level, the present book might be read as an attempt to do what Dewey never quite managed to do, that is, to state the politics appropriate to a world that has at last abandoned *The Quest for Certainty* [1929].)

Finally, in *Art as Experience* (1934), Dewey described the form of conduct he thought most responsive to experience's capacity to nurture and bring forth the fruits of meaning. Premised on a denial of reason's special access to what is real, that account effectively brought his critique of the Western philosophical tradition to a close. That conclusion, although marking the end of Dewey's journey, cannot be ours. For, as I suggest in these pages, Dewey's critique implicitly raises a question he himself could never quite pose: Does a commitment to the cause of significant experience now entail repudiation of our inveterate Enlightenment conviction that knowledge is the sine qua non of emancipation from the fetters of the present?

Although this artificially simplified exposition of Dewey's mature writings may suggest otherwise, I do not think it possible to extricate an untarnished and trouble-free philosophical system from beneath the accumulated weight of nearly a century's (mis)reading. His assessment of Francis Bacon is easily turned back on himself: "Like many another prophet, he suffers from confused intermingling of old and new."7 Dewey did not always adequately appreciate the demands placed on anyone seeking to remap from within the recalcitrant complex of meanings defined by our collective conceptual inheritance.8 This shortcoming is most apparent when, falling prey to the rationalism he wanted to criticize, he defined his project as an explication of the meaning of modern science. In his Logic (1938), for example, Dewey asserted that the "demand for reform of logic is the demand for a unified theory of inquiry through which the authentic pattern of experimental and operational inquiry of science shall become available for regulation of the habitual methods by which inquiries in the field of common sense are carried on."9 In his Theory of Valuation (1939), he compounded the problematic import of these claims by writing: "Not

<sup>7.</sup> Dewey, RP, p. 28.

<sup>8.</sup> On this point, see Dewey's essay "The Objects of Valuation," *Journal of Philosophy* 15 (1918), 258: "I console myself with a belief that while my own inexpertness in statement is largely responsible for my failure to make myself understood, some of the difficulty lies with the immensely difficult transformation in methods of thinking about all social matters which the theory implies."

<sup>9.</sup> Dewey, LTI, p. 98.

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only is science *a* value (since it is the expression and fulfillment of a special human desire and interest) but it is the supreme means of the valid determination of all valuations in all aspects of human and social life."<sup>10</sup> These quotations, although they may be interpreted in more or less charitable ways, make all but irresistible the positivist temptation to regard modern science as the final solution to philosophy's quest for an ahistorical tribunal whose privileged relation to the real justifies condemnation of all practice that does not bow before it. Encouraged by the Enlightenment's illusion that sufficient reconstruction of established forms of collective order can produce perfect concord among purely rational agents, Dewey too often identified the cause of his pragmatism with that of a liberalism whose state-centered order proves intolerant of all that resists extension of its finely textured web of (self-)disciplinary controls.

To refashion Dewey's project in ways that extend its soundest impulses while leaving its scientistic excesses behind, I have relocated his distinctive vocabulary within a political present that bears some elements of continuity and some of discontinuity with that out of which it originally emerged. How that transplantation has additionally altered the meaning of his words is a matter over which I have at best partial control. My hope is that whatever sense grows from such recultivation effectively contests previous accounts of the political bearing of pragmatism and at the same time contributes to ongoing debates about the possibilities of democratic politics in a scientific age.

Because the account of experience explicated in these pages renders highly problematic the notion of speaking in one's own voice, I have made Dewey a participant in this book's narrative rather than its object. It is unjust to ascribe the fruit of this exploratory dialogue either to myself or to Dewey. Consequently, I have employed a compositional form that, to the degree it is successful, exemplifies this book's substantive argument regarding the need to recover some sense of what experience might tender were it less completely subjected to the eviscerating categories of imperious reason. Braiding together Dewey's words and mine wherever I thought a paraphrase would diminish the former's punch, I have blurred but not effaced the distinction between my contribution and that of my collaborator.

With more than an ounce of misgiving, I have observed the scholarly convention of furnishing citations for quotations taken from

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Dewey's texts. But I have rejected other conventions that visually intimate that his words are independent matter awaiting objective representation rather than pregnant offerings whose potentialities have yet to be fully explored. I have, for example, dispensed with the custom of indenting and single-spacing longer quotations, with the use of ellipses to indicate when language from different texts has been merged within a single claim, and with the employment of colons to introduce quotations appropriated from Dewey's texts. Also, I have occasionally hyphenated words and phrases in order to accentuate the always tense relationship between how we *think* about experience and what it is to *have* such experience. Whether these stylistic peculiarities alleviate or aggravate the disabilities of Dewey's prose, which, Oliver Wendell Holmes once claimed, sounded much as "God would have spoken had He been inarticulate but keenly desirous to tell you how it was," is not for me to say.

I thank the Center for Dewey Studies, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, for permission to quote from the Southern Illinois edition of Dewey's previously unpublished works. Portions of this book have been published elsewhere, and I thank the journals and their publishers for permission to make use of this material. A portion of Chapter 2 appeared as "Politics and the Invention of Reason," *Polity* 21 (Summer 1989). Portions of Chapter 4 appeared as "John Dewey and the Liberal Science of Community," *Journal of Politics* 46 (November 1984), published by the University of Texas Press, and as "Modernity's Myth of Facts: Émile Durkheim on Political Education," *Theory and Society* 17 (1988), 121–145, copyright Kluwer Academic Publishers, reprinted by permission of Kluwer Academic Publishers. A portion of Chapter 6 appeared as "Pragmatism, Policy Science, and the State," *American Journal of Political Science* 29 (November 1985), published by the University of Texas Press.

For reasons only partly clear to me, this project took longer than anticipated to complete. Hence the matter of acknowledging my debts proves more than ordinarily complicated. To my siblings, my parents, and my children, I owe thanks for their toleration of my more than occasional crankiness. I am indebted to the National Endowment for the Humanities, the John Dewey Research Fund, and the Earhart

<sup>11.</sup> Oliver Wendell Holmes, quoted in James Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory: Social Democracy and Progressivism in European and American Thought*, 1870–1920 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 375.

Foundation for financial support at various stages of this project. To several of my teachers, including Harlan Wilson, the late John Lewis, Patrick Riley, Charles Anderson, Sheldon Wolin, and Dennis Thompson, I owe much of my sense of how to go about thinking theoretically about political matters. I am grateful to my colleagues at Whitman College, especially Mary Hanna, Dave Schmitz, Ed Foster, and David Deal, for their always patient encouragement. To Shirley Muse, I owe thanks for her unflagging willingness to print draft after draft of this manuscript. Both Holly Bailey and my anonymous readers deserve acknowledgment for their confidence in a manuscript whose idiosyncratic features gave others pause. I owe a special thanks to Dennis Wakefield for his relentlessly good-natured criticism of my every intellectual move. Finally, I am most deeply indebted to Sharon Kaufman-Osborn, for her example has shown me why it is that an argument of the sort advanced here is never merely an intellectual concern.

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