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Teaching John Dewey:
An Essay Review of Three Books on John Dewey

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Martin, Jay. (2002). *The Education of John Dewey: A Biography*. NY, NY: Columbia University Press
Pp. 592 $43 (hard cover) ISBN 10: 0231116764

Simpson, Douglas J. (2006). *John Dewey*: *Peter Lang Primer*. NY, NY: Peter Lang.
Pp. 159 $19 (paper cover) ISBN 10: 0820471364

Johnston, James Scott. (2006). *Inquiry and Education: John Dewey and the Quest for Democracy.* Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
Pp. 244 $25 (paper cover) ISBN 10: 0791467244

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I teach a core course entitled "Power, Politics and Policy" and have grappled with how to include Dewey in a graduate seminar that begins with Thomas Hobbes and ends with discussions of the *Bell Curve* and its critics. The curriculum was designed with the recognition that incoming doctoral students, both U.S. and international students, were increasingly unprepared for graduate level work. Apparently their previous educational experiences had emphasized too many multiple choice tests and pre-digested textbooks for them to be able to engage and comprehend dense original source material. Similarly, the

decline in undergraduate general education requirements made it impossible to assume common knowledge of the foundational ideas of Western society or world history. The course was created as reading intensive seminar grounded in original source material. But what to do with Dewey?

John Dewey was born two years before the Civil War and lived to see the Cold War. As a psychologist he is credited with developing the functionalist school; he helped found "pragmatism," which is widely considered the first "American" school of philosophy; and of course, he had an enormous impact on education research and pedagogical practice that ran from the Laboratory School he created at the University of Chicago in 1896 through his long tenure at Teachers College at Columbia University. He was also a prolific social critic of the type we currently call "public intellectuals." His written works have been collected in 37 volumes. Only teaching Hegel, Marx, and Sartre offer as daunting a challenge. I had used *Democracy and Education* (1916), which, while a definitive text, did not work well in isolation. Students simply did not have enough context to place the work within the history of social thought.

In seeking an answer to how to teach Dewey, I read three recent books on him that could not be more different from one another. Jay Martin's work, probably the definitive biography, discusses Dewey's life and intellectual development against a broad background of world history. Simpson's text is an accessible primer on Dewey, perhaps intended to introduce the man and his basic work to students in teacher preparation programs. Johnston's book is an elaborate defense of Dewey's philosophy (particularly his epistemology) against all critics foreign and domestic. There is so little overlap that I will discuss the volumes separately.

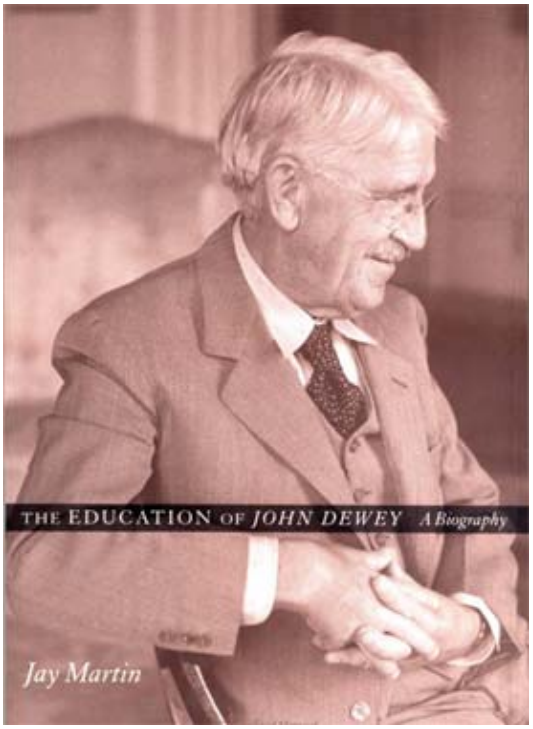
The Education of John Dewey

For my class, I have decided to adopt Jay Martin's biography, augmented by Dewey's much smaller book *Experience and Education* (1938). Although Martin mentions and discusses all of the major works briefly, *The Education of John Dewey* is not really an intellectual biography. Instead, it is a narrative of the man and his work set against the panorama of social change and world history during the tumultuous century roughly from 1850 to 1950. It is a Deweyan book on Dewey that presents the arc of Dewey's life and thought: child and student, husband and father, teacher, philosopher, logician, psychologist, and public intellectual in what Dewey would have considered a proper "society centered" fashion. As Martin saw his task:

> ...a biography must create for its subject a narrative *portraying* the drama of existence. Dewey *constructed* and was constructed by the life that he lived. His biography must be a *reconstruction* (p. 489) ... My biography is constituted by and brought into being as a

> search for John Dewey and the many faces he turned toward the light in the experience of liberating his life (p. 490) (emphasis in original).

For students such a project reveals an intellectual life well lived, but simultaneously offers a clear eyed view of the perils and privileges of work in the academy—an altogether different matter. Martin explores how Dewey "made the road by walking," to paraphrase the title of a book by Myles Horton and Paulo Freire, both of whom traveled in Dewey's footsteps.



Appropriately, the biography begins with a discussion of liberal and conservative traditions of New England Protestantism that strained the community into which Dewey was born. His elder brother, also named John, was burned alive in a terrible accident. One of the themes Martin traces throughout Dewey's long life is the role of the "replacement child," writing: "...replacement children inherit a duty to live not just for themselves and their parents but for the lost child as well" (p. 6.)[1] Dewey's businessman father volunteered and fought in the Civil War, whether out of liberal abolitionist fervor or because of guilt and a broken heart over the death of his son is unclear. His mother personified the conservative Puritan protestant ethic of New England farmers – a dying breed as textile factories came to dominate the landscape. As Martin makes clear, Burlington, Vermont, where Dewey grew up, was no longer a simple farming village but a university town and part of the cutting edge of an industrializing "mixed, stratified, and complicated country." (p. 33) Problems of immigration and poverty, for instance, were already visible. Thus Dewey inherited that peculiarly American Protestant ethic of social action and piety.

Other formative intellectual influences included Darwin—*The Origin of Species* was published the year Dewey was born as was Marx's *Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy*—and Herbert Spencer—who coined the term "survival of the fittest. He was introduced to Kant and the positivist sociology of August Comte by H.A.P. Torrey

[1]Two of Dewey's own children, Morris and Gordon, died during trips to Europe. Martin suggests that Gordon had been a replacement for Morris and that the couple later adopted an Italian child, Sabino, to replace Morris who had died in Italy.

at the University of Vermont.[2] Interestingly enough, however, it was "Right Hegelianism" that attracted the young philosopher both because it advocated a Protestantism that Dewey was as yet unwilling to give up, but more importantly because in Hegel's dialectic Dewey saw the unification of opposites and a vision of progress resonating with the American *Zeitgeist*.[3] The desire to resolve dualisms of mind and body, thought and action, runs through the corpus of Dewey's work, appearing in the attempts to unify philosophy and psychology, idealism and materialism, individual and society, theory and practice, art and science. No doubt "Right Hegelianism" reinforced Dewey's later hostility to Marxism and Communism and his deep-seated beliefs in social evolution over revolution. Martin listed the complex "isms" that have characterized what Dewey did: Pragmatism, instrumentalism, functionalism, operationalism, radical empiricism, idealistic empiricism, naturalistic empiricism, and transactionalism." (p. 493) Martin argues that Dewey was anti-foundationalist and an experimenter.

The unifying thread in Dewey's work was the Hegelian notion that being has its end in becoming, the absolute presupposition that forms the initial passages of the first chapter of the *Greater Logic,* "With What Must the Science Begin":

> *Pure Being and pure nothing* are, therefore, the same. What is the truth is neither being nor nothing, but that being — does not pass over but has passed over — into nothing, and nothing into being. But it is equally true that they are not undistinguished from each other, that, on the contrary, they are not the same, that they are absolutely distinct, and yet that they are unseparated and inseparable and that each immediately *vanishes in its opposite*. Their truth is therefore, this movement of the immediate vanishing of the one into the other: *becoming*, a movement in which both are distinguished, but by a difference which has equally immediately resolved itself.[4]

Dewey conceived not only of logic in this Hegelian way, but also of inquiry, democracy, education, experience, and the other central concerns of his long career – all were moving forces not abstract or static categories. Whether this constitutes a foundation, I could not say; but it is *becoming* that animated his writing and his life and let Dewey imagine "homo

[2]The version of Comte was translated by Harriet Martineau – early feminist, abolitionist, and sociologist – whose works we also read in the Power, Politics and Policy seminar.

[3] Dewey was strongly influenced by William Torrey Harris and the St. Louis Missouri Hegelian circle. It was Harris who published Dewey's first article in the *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* and the spirit of Hegel remains embedded in Dewey's work throughout his life. Harris also infected the young philosopher with the notion of education as a central problem of philosophy, psychology, and society.

[4]Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. (1969) [1812, 1813, and 1816] *Hegel's Science of Logic*. Translated by Arnold V. Miller. 2nd ed. New York: Humanities Press, pp. 82-83.

fabricator" as a better term for humankind than homo sapiens. (pp. 494-95)

Martin worked hard to integrate Dewey's intellectual life and practice within the backdrop of history. The biography is organized into three "Books": "Emergence," "Experience" and Engagement." The first brings takes Dewey from Protestant New England through becoming a philosopher. We learn of Dewey's first job at Ann Arbor where he married his wife, Alice, and started a family. The family next moved to the University of Chicago. Dewey published his initial philosophical and psychological works and taught both science and philosophy courses; his goal, Martin wrote, was to "combine German idealism with German experimentalism to produce an American psychology." (p.101)

In the second book, we learn of Dewey as father and educator but also of the administrative struggles over the Laboratory School. These *contretemps* led him to abruptly quit the University of Chicago in 1904 and move to Columbia University where he continued his life-long support of academic freedom and economic and social justice. During a bruising free speech fight at Columbia in 1917 over America's entry into World War I, which Dewey opposed, he even considered leaving Columbia for the New School for Social Research but stayed because his wife Alice objected. But once the war "to make the world safe for democracy" began, Dewey supported Wilson, although at the war's end he did not support the League of Nations. He was never afraid to take an unpopular stance. As a "controversialist," Dewey was a founding member of the New York Teachers Union, the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). He was associated with Jane Addams Hull House from its inception. He editorialized in the *New Republic*, the *New York Times* and *The Nation*. The relations of conscience, scholarship, university administration, and public opinion are not merely of historical interest, they are important lessons for graduate students on the threshold of university careers.

The third book, "Engagement," is the longest and in many ways the most informative of the trilogy. Dewey emerged as a global figure, conducting educational missions in Japan in 1919, followed by eighteen months in China during the social democratic period of Sun Yat-sen. This was an exhilarating time in China – and for Dewey. Martin notes that along with August Comte and Marx and Lenin, John Dewey and Bertrand Russell were central modernizing influences looked to as intellectual replacements for Confucianism. Alice Dewey gave her own lectures on feminism, politics, and the education of women; she found a much warmer welcome in revolutionary China than in traditional Japan. Throughout the engagement period, Dewey maintained a firm opposition to Marxism:

> He rejected dialectical materialism in favor of experimentalism; class warfare in favor of cooperation; revolutionary change in favor of evolutionary amelioration;

> party discipline in favor of freedom of thought; and the separation of means from ends in favor of their unity.... In short, he was a contented socialist but a fierce opponent of Marxism-Leninism (p.322).

The next educational mission, to Turkey in 1924, began the year after Kemal Atatürk was elected the first president and began a long process of modernization and Westernization. Dewey was invited to study and suggest how to reconstruct the Turkish education system. Two years after this remarkable opportunity, Dewey was in Mexico to research the Mexican education system. In 1928, he was invited to the Soviet Union to examine the emerging Communist system. In 1934, it was South Africa's turn. No American intellectual or educator has had such wide influence. During this period Alice died; they had been married nearly 41 years. Dewey continued her feminism, incorporating it into his ongoing project of "becoming" John Dewey. He developed an abiding interest in painting, adding the visual arts to his lifelong involvement with literature. He wrote *Experience and Nature,* identifying the products of thinking, including science, as works of art. The interest in art and aesthetics was returned to in his William James Lectures at Harvard, published later as *Art as Experience* (1934). In a typical Hegelian moment, Dewey argued*:* "The moment of passage from disturbance into harmony is that of intensest life."[5] He was invited to give the prestigious "Gifford Lectures" in Edinburgh, and crafts them into *The Quest for Certainty* in which he extends Heisenberg's "uncertainty principle" as a further attack on eternal truths, centering the living breathing experimenter into the heart of the experiment. Martin informs us that at the end of his own long intellectual journey, Emile Durkheim thought more highly of Dewey than any other living philosopher.

During the 1920s and the Great Depression years, Dewey's activism expanded. Refocusing on America after many years traveling abroad, he wrote *The Public and its Problems* in 1927. After the stock market crash of 1929, he supported a number of American socialist movements including the farm labor movement, always steering progressives away from the Communist Party. Other political books from the period include *Individualism, Old and New* (1930) and *Liberalism and Social Action* (1935). In all three works he presented American democracy as "becoming," not simply as an existing political system or a state reified in the founding documents. As Martin concluded, for Dewey "A state is an experiment." (p.389) "Dewey's conception is a double helix model of knowledge in which mind and society, knowing and doing, individuals and their neighbors all are spun forward by social evolution, twisting around and lifting one another as they rise." (p. 391) But, of course, the origins of Dewey's thought lay not in Watson and Crick but in Hegel, who provided even better descriptions

[5]Dewey, John. (2005) [1934]. *Art as Experience*. New York: Perigee Trade, p. 17.

of progress as a dialectical process. As he had to education, Dewey applied to politics the powerful conceptual tools of Hegelian idealism, the Protestant ethic shored of religion, and empirical experimentalism.

Embarking on one of the more interesting episodes in an interesting life, Dewey returned to Mexico in 1937 to be the impartial head of a tribunal investigating charges of treason that Stalin had brought against Leon Trotsky. The trial was held at the home of Frieda Kahlo and Diego Rivera, and when all the evidence was heard Trotsky was exonerated of the charges. Dewey had hesitated going back to Mexico for the Trotsky trial because he was engrossed in working on his book *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* (1938). Imagine, he published his seminal work on epistemology at age seventy-nine! Here also, expanding the Heisenberg uncertainty principle, Dewey abandoned the search for "Truth" in favor of "warrantable assertions" ... "...he casts doubt on the very procedures of deduction and induction that has [sic] seemed to be the constitutive ingredients of logic itself, and in place of these he substitutes a theory of inquiry in which the context of the investigation and the functions intended for the experiment are the determining factors" (Martin, p. 425). For Dewey inquiry is the human relationship to the world, a "mode of living activity." (p.425) In other words, science is subsumed under the broader category of inquiry. Martin recognized the "germ of his logic in Hegel's writings" (p.426) but argued that the addition of experimentalism and the attack on a scientific method or system moved him far beyond Hegel. A year after the *Logic,* Dewey published another text on his theory of knowledge, *Theory of Valuation*. Here he concluded that "desire" is the central connection between humans and the world of things (p.434), thus reducing one more dualism to a monistic singularity:

> In this integration not only is science itself *a* value (since it is the expression and fulfillment of a special human desire and interest) but it is the supreme means of a valid determination of all valuations in all aspects of human and social life. (Martin p. 434, quoting Dewey)

The biography ends with descriptions of Dewey's long decline, his second marriage, and praise from followers and attacks by critics. Dewey, for his part, returned to some of the old debates on what democratic education should be. From the 1930s through the war years and into the Cold War attacks on academic freedom intensified. School boards were pressured to stifle discussions of controversial social issues. Dewey saw such attacks as "a crime against democracy." (Martin p. 441, quoting Dewey) Dewey inveighed against Robert M. Hutchins's "Great Books" curriculum as privileging theory over action, "denigrating vocationalism," and being anti-scientific and absolutist. (p. 554) When Hutchins offered the Ancient Greeks as a model for higher education in the U.S., Dewey shot back that Greek education was for a privileged few in a slavocracy, something quite different from education suited to American democracy. Dewey proclaimed that

"educational reconstruction cannot be accomplished without a social reconstruction in which higher education has a part to play." (Martin p. 455 quoting Dewey) At age 81, he vigorously defended Bertrand Russell when the religious right of the time forced the City College of New York to cancel a speaking engagement, writing to a friend:

> If men are going to be kept out of American colleges because they express unconventional, unorthodox or even unwise views ... on political, economic, social or moral matters ... I am heartily glad my own teaching days have come to an end. There will always be some kept prostitutes in any institution. (Martin p. 447 quoting Dewey)

Dewey also sought to distance his own theory and practice from his many "followers," claiming the mantle of "progressive education." He denied that his approach to teaching was child centered; insisting it was society centered. In *Experience and Education* (1938), "Dewey was asking, in what way can 'experience' and 'education,' being and learning, be positively linked in human becomingness?" (p. 464) He pointedly argued: "I don't believe people learn merely by doing. The important things are the ideas that a man puts into his doing. Unintelligent doing will result in his learning the wrong thing." (Martin p. 477 quoting Dewey) As Martin explained: "In Dewey's true educational laboratory, accountability would be relentlessly examined through daily participant observation." (p.496) A central Deweyan term, "miseducation," another unification of opposites, identified the need for "'education of the laboratory,' which involves experiment, inquiry, 'thorough testing, through observation and reflection – all processes requiring *activity* of mind'" (Martin p. 461 quoting Dewey, emphasis in the original). In sum:

> As I see the matter, ... what marks the scientific movement that began a few centuries ago and that has established a veritable revolution in the methods and conclusions of natural science are its *experimental* conduct and the fact that even the best established theories retain *hypothetical* status (Martin p. 480 quoting Dewey).

Fourteen years before Dewey was born and Marx turned decisively to political economy, the young Marx was grappling with Hegel's idealistic logic and materialistic revisions introduced by the same in the "Young Hegelian Circle." He made a series of notes on the work of Ludwig Feuerbach who, similar to Dewey, sought to merge Hegelian Idealism with scientific materialism. In the Third Thesis of his critique, Marx wrote that:

> The materialist doctrine concerning the changing of circumstances

> and upbringing forgets that circumstances are changed by men and that it is essential to educate the educator himself. This doctrine must, therefore, divide society into two parts, one of which is superior to society.
>
> The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-changing can be conceived and rationally understood only as *revolutionary practice.* (Emphasis in original)[6]

There are several ways that last sentence can be understood: The practice of revolution, a new form of practice – the unification of theory and practice in "praxis," and that "comprehension" must itself be a form of action. Marx supported the new form of comprehension elsewhere in the theses, famously concluding "Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it."[7] These works of the young Marx were not translated into English before Dewey died and there is no indication that he read them in German. Nevertheless, while Dewey eschewed political revolution, he took from Hegel the other interpretations, developing praxis into pragmatism as an active and engaged philosophy dedicated to changing the world, and arguing that "learning disconnected from intelligent action was metaphysics without physics." (p. 453) In other words, action not based on careful thought was mere activism; thought without action was a form of self gratification. Like Marx, Dewey rejected mechanical materialist doctrines that had no central place for social desire. Martin, for his part, has shown how world events and Dewey's own thoughts, choices, and actions educated the educator.

John Dewey: Peter Lang Primer

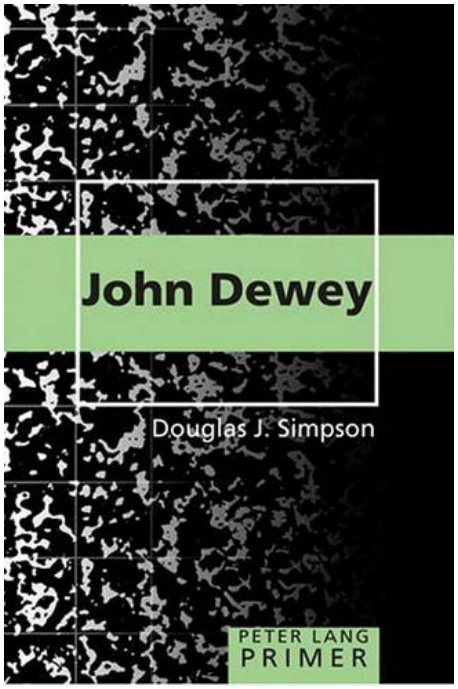
Simpson's primer is a generally uncritical and personal account of Dewey's life that introduces Dewey's scholarship and some of his core ideas. Students seem increasingly interested in standpoint issues (what Dewey termed "perspectivism"), and the rich details of Dewey's long life help contextualize and humanize his work. Simpson accepts Dewey's own self-definition as an "Educational Crank," which frees Simpson from having to treat his work as a philosophical system (an attempt which, we will soon see, ties James Scott Johnston up in knots). While the book does not try to put Dewey's thought in either historical or philosophical context, it is a good overview. The student is quickly introduced to Dewey's life, his academic career, his two marriages, and his many much loved children – including ones the Deweys adopted in Italy and Nova Scotia. Simpson synthesized Dewey's view of teaching: "...he argued strenuously for a well-

[6]Marx, Karl. "Theses on Feuerbach." In *The German Ideology*, edited by C.J. Arthur. (1970) [1844-45]. New York: International Publishers, p. 121.

[7] Ibid p. 123.

educated and reflective teacher who is a professionally autonomous educator, not a soldier who follows the orders of others." (p. 11) This is very much the impression the book is meant to leave with pre-service or in-service teachers.

After introducing Dewey, the book is organized into three main chapters: The Reflective Person, The School Curriculum, and The Democratic School. The Reflective Person introduces notions of open-mindedness in contrast to the dogmatic personality. The need to proceed empirically from the concrete situation by using "logic" conceived as "how we think" is proposed in opposition to *a priori* philosophical systems. (p. 29) Fixed images of human nature are challenged by the ability of education to "modify human nature." (p. 31) Simpson, following Dewey, argues for placing children in multicultural classrooms where their dogmatic beliefs will be challenged by diverse opinions. He also argues for the centrality of academic freedom as a safeguard against dogmatic nationalism and the miseducation of state schools.



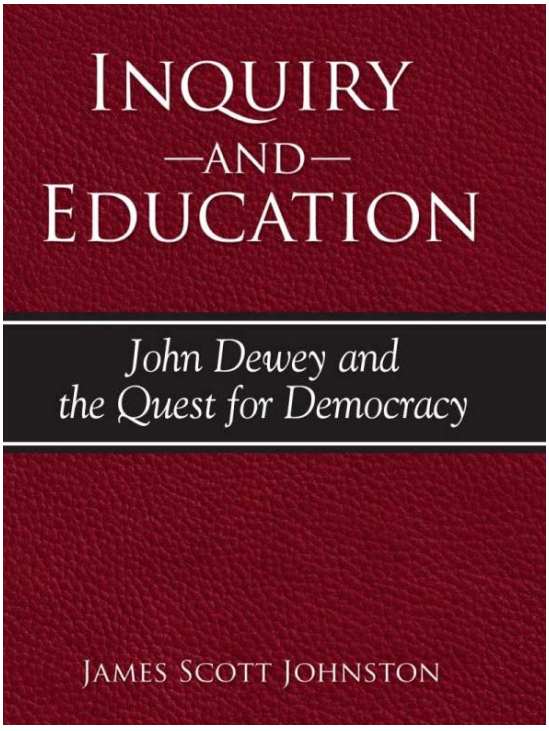
The School Curriculum chapter might be thought of as a brief introduction to curriculum studies. Varieties of curricula are discussed: intended, received, hidden, assessed, and so forth. Simpson organized Dewey's thoughts on curriculum according to environmental, human, instructional, and knowledge dimensions. (p. 57) He contrasts educative and miseducative experiences and emphasizes the centrality of "growth" and education as a social process in all of Dewey's thought. While Simpson doesn't make the connection explicit, it is interesting to see the origins of what is currently called "Cultural Capital" in Dewey's discussions of the social environments within which educational institutions function. (pp. 60ff) In this chapter, the lessons offered are particularly suitable for future practitioners, especially the study-your-own-school and know-your-students advice offered throughout.

The last chapter, The Democratic School, introduces Dewey's core concepts connecting school to participation in a democratic society. Along the way, Simpson knocks down many myths and strawman arguments about Dewey's pedagogy as permissive, child centered, undisciplined and impractical. He discusses Dewey's arguments for preventing fossilized social classes from hindering the development of a meritocracy, the importance of multicultural education, ethics, and the centrality of individual responsibility. More concrete examples like the discussion of employment discrimination on page 126 would have given students a better grounding of the meaning of Dewey's concepts, like the need for situational and experimental approaches to ethical

problems. Nonetheless, this chapter would provoke many useful discussions in any teacher education course.

The book is generally well constructed for students. On the one hand, glossaries at the end of each chapter are helpful, as is the layout of the text with wide margins which the publishers use to "pull out" definitions highlighting important issues. Moreover, throughout the book Simpson raises questions and objections intended to challenge critical thought in the reader. On the other hand, the lack of an index is a serious flaw. Another oddity in a book intended for undergraduates is the author's citation style. Simpson has written extensively on Dewey, and it is perhaps to be expected that his original Dewey sources follow the practices of the Center for Dewey Studies. Nevertheless citations like (EW 1:227-249) left me confused until I deciphered that EW meant *Early Works*. I only discovered the brief note on sources while writing this review, as it lies buried on the title page in a section of appreciations and permissions. All in all, however, this slim volume is a good read and a useful and accessible introduction to Dewey.

Inquiry and Education



James Scott Johnston's tome, *Inquiry and Education: John Dewey and the Quest for Democracy*, offers an entirely different approach to Dewey studies. This book, with likely origins in a doctoral dissertation, is a densely reasoned text for philosophers of education or perhaps graduate students in a course solely devoted to John Dewey. Johnston takes an interesting tack: "This book begins not with what Dewey did or wrote; rather with what his critics and supporters have said. ... The task is then to evaluate the claims of the critics and supporters and to see what can be made of Dewey's statements in light of these." (p. viii) While Johnston's thoroughly modernist intent is to rescue Dewey's concept of "inquiry" and make it the epistemological centerpiece of Dewey's philosophic system, the approach taken produces a curiously opposite effect. To this reader, at least, the book is much more of a postmodern deconstruction. While many of my students seem to use "deconstruct" as a synonym for "analyze," and I do not think Johnston used the term at all, the logic of

presentation in *Inquiry and Education* completely revolves around various readings of the Deweyan concepts. Texts from supporters, critics, and Dewey himself are juxtaposed, examined, re-read, and unpacked to define and comprehend underlying implicit assumptions and frameworks. While Johnston intends to "...see what Dewey can and cannot be charged with, and if charged, what can be done to respond to the charges" (p. vii), the thoroughly poststructuralist consequence of the multiple voices, including Johnston's apologia, is to hold the oeuvre of a modernist philosopher in the fires of postmodernism. In consequence, if not in intent, Dewey's attempt to build a philosophical system collapses as a grand narrative leaving only shards and remnants in its wake.

While I wonder if Johnston has set foot in a real school lately, he is correct in many of his defenses against some of Dewey's detractors.[8] Unlike certain critics such as Dianne Ravitch[9] and E. D. Hirsch[10], Johnston marshals compelling evidence that Dewey is not responsible for the schools we have. As he asserted, "Much of the criticism of those inimical to Dewey's project of social intelligence manifests as a disbelief in the capacity of schools to accomplish the task of socializing citizenry and democratizing inquiry." (p.166) Actually, avoiding miseducation was Dewey's project, both socialization and the democratization of inquiry were and are ongoing social processes. While schools may not socialize in ways Dewey (or Johnston) would approve, it seems silly to suggest that compulsory schooling – from playing field to science class – is not a major socialization factor. Who could imagine any society in which education was not first and foremost about social and cultural reproduction? In my state of Arizona, for instance, the state legislature has mandated that every classroom up through the university have posted an American flag and large copies of the Constitution and Bill of Rights.

Following Dewey, Johnston insists that "inquiry" is context driven, but he did not adopt context driven inquiry as the method for the study of Dewey. Little systematic attention is paid to historical, social, or personal context in the development and progression of Dewey's own line of reasoning. For example, on pages 42 and following pages Johnston advocates a broad and non-scientistic notion of inquiry; he does this by comparing Deweyan texts from 1909-1938, suggesting that there was continuity in Dewey's thought and that he was not enshrining a "scientific method."[11] He argues that Dewey meant "that inquiry should be thought of as not only context bound but self-correcting, self-adjusting. For if inquiry is self-correcting then it follows that it can vary

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[8]Dewey's *Democracy and Education* was listed as number five of the "Ten Most Harmful Books of the 19th and 20th Centuries" by the Conservative magazine *Human Events*. It was neatly sandwiched between *The Kinsey Report* and *Das Kapital*.

[9] Ravitch, Dianne. (2000). *Left Back: A Century of Failed School Reforms*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

[10]Hirsch, E. D. (1996). *The Schools We Need: And Why We Don't Have Them*. New York: Doubleday.

[11]This is in direct contrast with Jay Martin's approach in *The Education of John Dewey: A Biography*. New York: Columbia University Press (2002). Curiously this seminal work is not even mentioned in the Johnston text.

with time, with context, and with its capacity to proffer workable solutions to problems." (p. 27) Clearly, if inquiry is context driven and self correcting then it comes in many forms, which should be examined in context rather than conflated into an overall definition. Moreover, some kinds of inquiry that Dewey might have seen as miseducation, have always been present in even the most "under-resourced" and didactic school. In real world schools, this broad notion of inquiry would necessarily overlap with student agency and resistance which is undeniably a form of inquiry into schooling itself.

Johnston recognized that it is unfortunate that Dewey called philosophy "the criticism of criticisms," but he would have been better advised to follow Dewey's own definition and practice of inquiry as "context bound." (p.187) That means beginning with real world issues and the observer's standpoint rather than seeking to pin down abstracted concepts of "inquiry, experience, growth, community, and democracy." Johnston might, for instance, have started with the educational debates and practices of today: vouchers; school choice; racial, ethnic, and social class segregation, and the like, and moved from the concrete to examine Deweyan notions such as "The bond between inquiry, growth, and community insists that students having different backgrounds and experiences be present in school." (p. 195) In practice, though, Johnston begins with inquiry and iterates each additional term in his series of chapters: "Inquiry and Science," "Inquiry, Experience, and Growth," Inquiry, Growth and Community," and so on. The book floats on an abstract and tedious level of discussion with only the most inchoate and cursory reference to the practical and concrete.

One consequence of taking the philosophical road is that Johnston (and perhaps Dewey himself) is unable to imagine adequately either the importance of the irrational in human affairs or the central role of conflict as enduring and endemic. Johnston can be gently critical of Dewey, but he does not interrogate the notions of "organicism" permeating Dewey's concept of growth or the implicit identification of growth of the child and the growth of society. Thus he stands on statements like:

> ...no amount of rereading of Dewey dispels the notion that his optimism in the capacity of the public to form, or existing institutions to be dismantled for (the purpose of growth and community) is overwrought. The best that one can do, I believe, is to suggest that it is education that Dewey has in mind as the chief vehicle for the transformation of the public, and, with the chief task of education being growth, the development of inquiry in this endeavor is central. This can occur only in one child, one school, and one community at a time.

The last section of the book, "Inquiry, Growth, Community, and Democracy," is the least satisfying or convincing, again because it rarely touches the ground of the here and now, staying firmly in the "criticism of criticism" stratosphere. Philosophical

dissertations on the nature of science, religion, and democracy, for instance, are offered in place of the real conflicts over political control of the schools: market models versus state administration, the increasing role of the federal government, the content of the curriculum, the unequal distribution of educational resources. Johnston defends Dewey against accusations that Pragmatism supports the existing power structure, that "schools indoctrinate children" to the existing system (p. 162), that he ignored the deficiencies and failings of scientific understanding (p. 164). He cites Richard Rorty on the bankruptcy of philosophy which is irrelevant to the "liberal, bourgeois, postmodern state," (p. 165) and on the failure of method (p.172-173); and he cites John Stuhr[12] who holds that schools are losing many of their social reproduction functions to mass media, globalization, advertising and big business, the military, religious organizations, and the like (pp.166-167). Johnston then argues that these criticisms are "easily dispelled" and offers once again close readings of Dewey's writings in his rescue mission.

Johnston, then, like Dewey, is a moral entrepreneur offering prescriptions for using schools as the engines of social change. In the end the attempt to re-construct Dewey after the long and detailed multiple readings is not successful. The philosophical road constructs an idealist and linguistic argument which is ahistorical, ignores social structures, conflict, and competition for scarce resources while wasting an enormous amount of time and effort defending Dewey's language and arguing the fine points of definitions of little interest to anyone but dedicated Dewey scholars. *Inquiry and Education: John Dewey and the Quest for Democracy* began with critiques and ideas; it ended in the same place.

These three works on Dewey, however, remind readers—especially educators—of the importance of Dewey's liberalism in the world today. We read Dewey in frightened and mean-spirited times. Our era is characterized by a seemingly unending "war on terror," presented as necessary restrictions of constitutional freedoms and civil rights; attacks on scientific rationality are mounted by creationists, abetted by similar attacks on the enlightenment by post-modernists in the academy; there is a powerful movement in the U.S. to take public schooling out of the democratic arena entirely and sell education in the market like any other commodity. Half a century after nine students sought to enter the all white high school in Little Rock, hopes for multicultural and desegregated schools are dwindling. There is little time or room for Deweyan inquiry in classrooms dominated by mandated "teacher proof" curricula and high stakes standardized tests. The academic freedoms Dewey fought for as the bedrock of democracy are again shaken as tenured faculty are removed for unpopular political opinions and untenured

[12]Stuhr, John. (2003). *Pragmatism, Postmodernism, and the Future of Philosophy*. New York: Routledge.

faculty are increasingly afraid to speak out for fear of losing their jobs and careers. Dewey lived through similar periods. His work and life offer students not only scholarship and political vision, but the role model of the activist intellectual who, for richer or poorer—in sickness and in health—fought the good fight against anti-democratic forces of ignorance and repression. No one did it better.

About the Reviewer

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