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Dewey's Enduring Impact: Essays on America's Philosopher.

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The 23 essays in this volume commemorate the 150th anniversary of John Dewey's birth. They discuss the importance of his work in epistemology, value theory, religion, aesthetics, politics and education both in terms of the impact it has had and the impact contributors deem it ought to have.

Dewey's philosophy emerged out of, and helped displace, the forms of absolute idealism that dominated Anglo-American philosophy at the end of the 19th century. It endured alongside powerful rivals, including Bertrand Russell's logical atomism and the varieties of positivism that emerged from the Vienna Circle. Unlike Russell and the positivists, Dewey encouraged philosophers to view their questions as being on a par with those of empirical science and to follow the experimental method in pursuit of answers to them. The suggestion was not that philosophers track and then imitate what practicing scientists do but rather that they proceed in the manner of engineers who uncover the conditions of successful bridge building and devise norms for further construction in light of their findings. Philosophers, Dewey urged, should investigate the psychological, cultural, biological and material conditions of successful inquiry and pursue their questions with these in mind. His work in philosophy is devoted to developing a model of intelligent inquiry based on what he considered to be the best science available and extending it, not only to non-scientific inquiry in the arts and humanities, but to the search for knowledge outside institutions of higher learning – in public schools, workplaces, community associations and political organizations.

In devising his philosophy, Dewey is guided by the very model of inquiry he develops and defends. Faced with problems that he finds pressing in philosophy and the wider culture he traces their historical, cultural, intellectual and material roots. Then, having determined the conditions that give rise to these problems, he devises views to solve or otherwise overcome them. Rather than demonstrate that his solutions are correct, Dewey offers them as hypotheses – as proposals worth implementing to see if they will remedy problems in the way that he predicts. Thus, his philosophy is less a set of definitive theses than of views held tentatively pending experimental verification.

The first part of *Dewey's Enduring Impact* contains essays that aim to establish the relevance of Dewey's thought to contemporary philosophy. Philip Kitcher endorses Dewey's conception of "well-ordered inquiry" as a way to turn philosophy away from problems of interest only to a small group of specialists towards questions that make a difference in people's lives. This effort to bring philosophy back into contact with human concerns is endorsed by Hilary Putnam, who defends Dewey's insights into the interconnection of facts and values as an important step in this direction. Paul Kurtz, meanwhile, draws on a view of human beings suggested to him by contemporary biology to defend Dewey's claim that concrete problem-solving, rather than reliance on fixed principles or absolute ends, is the best means of

reconstructing our values and beliefs – a task Kurtz thinks especially important given threats to human survival.

The second part of the book includes essays that discuss the prospects of Dewey's naturalistic account of knowledge. Peter Godfrey-Smith explains and raises questions about Dewey's distinction between non-cognitive experience – which, for him, is immediate and qualitative – and scientific knowledge, which uncovers relations among things and events through experimentation. Jay Shulkin, on the other hand, embraces Dewey's account of objects and natural kinds in terms of stable relations in nature, rather than fixed species or essences, and suggests that this view reflects fundamental features of human biology and cognitive architecture. Arthur Efron, for his part, outlines several debates in evolutionary biology that pragmatists have overlooked, despite having important contributions to make. And Randall Auxier, the lone dissenter from Dewey's naturalism in this section, protests that Dewey's biological and psychological account of the connection between immediate experience and ideal ends is inferior to the phenomenological account found in the work of Josiah Royce and Charles Peirce.

Essays grouped under the heading “Culture and Values” deal with Dewey's views of religion and ethics. John Peter Anton argues that in rejecting attempts to derive an ideal of human flourishing from a theory of human nature, Dewey leaves unanswered important questions about the aims of his project of raising individuals to be good citizens. Nathan Bupp defends Dewey's response to the worry that his rejection of supernatural metaphysics leaves us without a sense of meaning or purpose in life and James Gouinlock argues that Dewey's emphasis on becoming (i.e., change), rather than being (i.e., permanence), represents a profound shift in paradigm from Greek and modern philosophy. In addition, Ruth Anna Putnam points to tensions in Dewey's effort to square his appreciation of the importance of religious experiences in people's lives with his denial of the supernatural, while Larry Hickman thinks that Dewey provides a compelling middle ground between accounts of spirituality that invoke supernatural metaphysics and accounts that dismiss it outright.

The section of the book on “Lived Experience” deals with Dewey's theory of art and aesthetic experience. Joseph Margolis maintains that while Dewey failed properly to explain the connection between our biological capacities and our capacity for the production and appreciation of art, his work all but suggests the right account, one according to which selves and artworks are artifactual and ontologically *sui generis*. Russell Pryba worries that Dewey's claim that the meaning of an artwork is the result of certain transactions between individuals and objects fails to account for the fact that works of art can take on new interpretations without thereby becoming new works. Drawing on Margolis' views, he offers an account of art objects that rectifies this problem while preserving Dewey's basic insights into aesthetic experience. Finally, Judy Walker compares recent discussions of narrative with Dewey's analysis of creative work in art to urge a view of personhood and meaningful experience that remains free of supernatural trappings.

The next section of the book deals with Dewey's political thought. Susan Carle discusses Dewey's role in the founding of the NAACP and its impact on his views about race and the role of public education in a democracy. Judith Green argues that the differences between Dewey's

view of democratic intelligence and John Rawls's views of public reason have been exaggerated and that our conception of liberal democracy can be enriched by drawing insights from both views. Gregory Fernando Pappas thinks Dewey's model of political deliberation offers a way to negotiate the kind of ideological gridlock prevalent in contemporary American politics without acquiescing in the sort of unprincipled pragmatism that aims merely to get around conflicts by any available means. To close this section, Eric Thomas Weber discusses the implications of Dewey's philosophy for devising a notion of leadership that is democratic and inclusive rather than hierarchical, authoritarian, or elitist.

The last group of essays considers the impact of Dewey's views on education. Stephen Fishman and Lucile McCarthy discuss their Deweyan experiments in teaching writing by focusing on the process of composition rather than the product and, in light of their results, urge the value of encouraging students to integrate material by connecting it to their personal lives. Giuseppe Spadafora discusses Dewey's notion of a science of education and its influence among democratic reformers in Italy after World War II and Massimo Vittorio continues the story of Dewey's reception in Italy by discussing the cultural obstacles that prevented an accurate rendering of Dewey's views.

On the whole, the volume provides an interesting and helpful overview of the work Dewey's philosophy has inspired. The breadth and diversity of the papers is a testament to the scope of Dewey's thought and the power of his mind and although a few of the essays are poor, most include sympathetic summaries, thoughtful criticisms and novel applications of Dewey's views. Among these, I found the papers by Godfrey-Smith, Ruth Anna Putnam, Pryba, Carle, and Green to be the most thought-provoking.

Viewed as a case for Dewey's enduring importance, however, the collection is less successful. As is typical of volumes drawn from conference proceedings, the topics taken up for discussion are determined by the interests of individual contributors without any view to providing complete coverage of Dewey's ideas. As a result, important aspects of his thought are passed over. His formulations of the main problems of philosophy and his diagnoses of their historical and cultural sources are not discussed. Nor is his view of "problematic situations" as qualitative wholes that are progressively intellectualized and reunified through inquiry examined. The psychological views underlying his model of intelligence are not scrutinized – notwithstanding the fact that his behavioral analysis of language, perception, reasoning, truth and warrant antedates the so-called cognitive revolution. Even the discussions that highlight the connection of his ethics and social philosophy to his account of intelligence are aimed more at outlining his views than delving into them.

In addition, since most of the contributors focus on the implications of Dewey's work, they tend to summarize his views rather than examine the case he makes for them. The problem with this is that it is very difficult to convey the results of Dewey's investigations in isolation from his technical discussions without making them seem platitudinous. In this volume, we are told, for example, that Dewey helps us remember that "if we are smart, we can improve our moralities just as we improve any other tools" (12), that "[w]e need always to work within the context of existing praxis and culture" and "draw upon science and reason to understand natural causes and cultural means... to directly intervene to ameliorate the human condition" (69). We

read that Dewey's "prescriptive ideal is the enlarged expansive self: a resourceful human being deeply engaged in life, capable of drawing from a medley of intellectual and artful talents" (162). In addition, "[h]e urges...an active and ongoing coping with difficult conditions; for to do so is to be in a learning situation"—on his view, "*experience is pedagogical*" (164) and "problematic situations are opportunities for growth" (240). "To say," with Dewey, "that experience is the ultimate authority is to say that we are free to adjust to new circumstances, that we are able to develop new conceptions of an attainable better future" (190–191) and, in light of such a view, "leaders must be open to revising their conceptions when better ways of conceiving of problems arise" (299). Finally, "[w]hat makes Dewey successful now... is his strong *faith* in mankind and its possibilities with no absolute frameworks" and his cultivation of an "attitude of permanent doubt, of continuous opening to the world and the others" (344).

Nor is the case for Dewey's importance helped much by repeating time and again that he thinks inquiry is a continuous process, embedded in a social context, connected to practice, lacking fixed goals or principles and subject to evolution and growth in response to an environment that is dynamic, perilous, and contingent. There is no arguing the accuracy of this characterization, but merely rehearsing it does not make it either clear or compelling. Noting that Dewey's views are at odds with doctrines central to the work of Plato, Descartes, or other "traditional philosophers" does not do much to establish his reputation either. Granted, one would be hard-pressed to overestimate the depth of Dewey's departures from his predecessors, but even assuming there is nothing to be said in behalf of the views he dispenses with – a question not explored in this volume – it does not follow that his positive philosophy is the sole or best alternative to them.

I am not suggesting that the contributors or editors be held responsible for the image of Dewey that emerges from a collection of independently written papers. Nor do I mean to imply that a careful review of the fundamentals of Dewey's philosophy would reveal it to be a house of cards. My point is only that because the detailed work behind Dewey's views does not receive much scrutiny in this volume, there is a risk that readers new to Dewey's work will – despite the best intentions of the editors and contributors – come away thinking that his philosophy is far less rich and profound than it is.

Indeed, judging from the essays collected here, one could be forgiven for thinking that Dewey's influence on contemporary philosophers has more to do with their admiration of his ideals – the growth of intelligence, openness to alternative views, a sense of our fallibility, civic-mindedness, universal public education, racial and gender equality, and democracy – than with any detailed case he makes for the philosophy that informs his vision and gives it whatever concrete content and force it may have. At a time when facts count for little in politics, drone attacks and renditions are carried out without pause, fundamentalism – religious and economic – goes unchecked, divisions of class, race and gender remain unhealed, public institutions are eviscerated and democratic institutions disemboweled, it is laudatory and even uplifting to find serious scholars rallying to the defence of Dewey's causes. But Dewey's importance lies in his mastery of the discipline and in the way he brings us to his moral vision, not merely in the vision itself. While this collection provides a useful introduction to Dewey's views and ably demonstrates the pertinence of his ideas to urgent contemporary concerns, it leaves the complex task of assessing the cogency and viability of Dewey's philosophy to others to carry out.

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