Paul Fairfield. *Introducing Dewey*. Bloomsbury 2024. 240 pp. $109.50 USD (Hardcover 9781350297838); $36.50 USD (Paperback 9781350297845).

With his *Introducing Dewey*, Paul Fairfield has written an important overview of the key themes and issues discussed by Dewey over his long career as an academic and activist. All the topics covered by Dewey are introduced, including his views on experience, knowledge, morals, politics, education as well as his later reflections on religion and aesthetics. Fairfield rightly places special emphasis on Dewey's view of experience and his 'experimentalism' as central for linking together his views in these areas. He also does well in pinpointing for readers the central motives and commitments that underlie Dewey's specific views. The result is an impressive introduction to Dewey's work that rivals others written in recent years. The following will touch briefly on some of the main highlights and conclude with a few minor quibbles.

The first chapter, 'Dewey's Context', usefully traces the relevant features of his biography and the main influences on his thought (1-24). Dewey's own philosophical education required that he engage with several movements that would remain an ongoing influence on his developing philosophy. Of these, the combination of Darwinian biology and Hegelian idealism would be especially important, as would the emerging pragmatism of Peirce and James. From this background emerges Dewey's empiricism and its view of experience, a unique synthesis of Hegel and Darwinian biology (8). On this view, creatures and their environments are interdependent with experience itself consisting of varied interactions and relationships between them. This perspective would partly inform Dewey's further rejection of the scholastic tendencies of professional philosophy, and his alternative social and cultural conception of philosophy and its problems (17-18). Here, he argues that philosophy has the distinct moral task of navigating the cultural tensions that emerge between new forms of knowledge and traditional values, where this can be especially seen in a fast-paced modern world.

Chapters 2 and 3 form the central core of the book, with their respective discussions of idealism's influence on Dewey's view of experience, and the further extension of this view into the theory of knowledge, what Fairfield calls 'Pragmatic Experimentalism' (51). As Dewey would later acknowledge, Hegel remained a deep influence on his thinking, including his view of experience and its departure from British empiricism. Our experience is full of inference as well as objects and is not a simple passive affair, as Fairfield quotes Dewey: 'Experience… is a matter of *simultaneous* doings and sufferings' (39). His empiricism then rejects the dualisms of modern empiricism while maintaining the Hegelian view that all experience is mediated by our human perspective (46). Turning to Dewey's epistemology, or what he would later call the 'theory of inquiry', we can see the importance of this empiricist perspective. Our basic experiential perspective is one of agency, where we respond to struggles by actively using parts of our environment. Dewey criticizes the spectator view of modern epistemology, which portrays us as passive recipients of sensation in favour of inquiry as an active construction. Suggested solutions are to be evaluated in terms of their consequences for resolving the problems that emerge in our everyday experience. This pattern of inquiry is modeled on the successes of experimental science

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in terms of testing ideas or hypotheses through further expected experiential consequences.

The next two chapters on Dewey's moral philosophy and his liberal politics build on this key combination of experience and commitment to experimentalism. The pattern of inquiry briefly sketched above is here extended to moral and political life. In moral philosophy, Dewey begins with moral experience, the everyday moral conflicts we confront as we deal with others (76-84). Resolving such conflicts requires reflection and careful judgment, what he calls 'reflective morality'. This view of moral inquiry stresses the need for the careful assessment of the values that conflict in each situation in order to determine what to do. This same perspective is found in his work on political life. Just as he would resist offering a list of virtues or fundamental ethical principles, he refused to provide a fixed set of political doctrines or principles (103-4). This is what one should expect from an experimentalist approach to these issues. Dewey draws from several different positions, in attempting to suggest hypotheses measured in terms of where they might lead given our aims and interests. If he is to be consistent, he cannot be committed to an outcome from the start, this is precisely what his experimentalist view denies. With respect to political judgements, what matters most is their ability to solve social problems, not any prior conformity to a set of ready-made ideals or principles (104). This can also be seen with Dewey's commitment to democracy as the best form of group life. Dewey's political philosophy, as a set of hypotheses measured in terms of success at social problem solving, can be understood, Fairfield explains, as derived from this commitment to democracy as a way of life (106-18).

In the wider world beyond philosophy, Dewey is still best known for his work in education, which is the topic of the next chapter. Fairfield's discussion highlights the role Dewey's experimentalist view of inquiry plays in his educational philosophy (130). He famously stresses that we should begin with student's interests and guide them into worthwhile educational channels. Of further importance is creating an active, involved learning environment. Education is primarily concerned with developing more enriching experiences for the continued pursuit of lifelong learning (137-41). It should also initiate students into the critical thinking required for sound judgment, central to democracy as Dewey conceives it. Fairfield highlights the important differences between Dewey's view and the progressive educational movement that he has often been associated with (154-7).

Chapter 7 and 8 treat Dewey's later discussions of religion and aesthetics. Followers and critics alike have been puzzled by Dewey's foray into religion. He is clear on his rejection of religious beliefs, doctrines and the various institutions that have been associated with them. However, he refrains from adopting an overly militant atheist stance, and instead wonders if there is a conception of the 'religious' that survives its separation from the supernatural (171-4). Stated briefly, his answer depends on locating a religious element in our experience, where this is more about attitudes and their function rather than belief. For Dewey, religious attitudes provide enduring support to our lives, which results in an improved adjustment to life and its surrounding conditions. This type of adjustment or coping through the pursuit of ideals is both self and world transforming. While not as developed as his other views, these suggestions are, as Fairfield mentions, an attempt to make room for spirituality within modern scientific and secular society

(181). Dewey's philosophy of art is also grounded in his theory of experience. Aesthetic experience is here seen as part of our everyday experience but as furthering a 'vital dimension of a larger experience of the word' (186). Dewey argues against various dualisms found in the theory of art which separates art from experience and thereby robs it of its significance. Stated briefly, he views the aesthetic as implicit in experience where under the right conditions it yields a unity that enriches our experience and expands our view of ourselves (190-7).

Now for some concluding quibbles. First, one minor historical point concerns Fairfield's claim that Peirce coined the term 'Pragmatism' (8; 68). It was James that used the term in an 1898 lecture attributing it to Peirce. Peirce was unhappy with James' position and introduced 'Pragmaticism' for his own view, claiming that its ugliness would save it from kidnappers. Controversies about the meaning of the term have continued, and as Fairfield notes, Dewey himself shied away from its use. Fairfield further highlights what he sees as the significant affinities between Dewey's philosophy and the work of continental philosophers. Some commentators might be skeptical of such comparisons, since, as Fairfield also notes, Dewey never directly engaged with these thinkers. The suggestion here is that such comparisons and similarities do little to further our understanding of the context and content of Dewey's own thought. However, if one is interested in bridge building between traditions then such comparisons might be helpful. This is especially true if one is interested in engaging with American pragmatism but have a background in continental European thought. The concluding legacy chapter, while striking the right tone, could have been strengthened by providing some further specific indications of the ongoing influence of Dewey's ideas. Some examples might include Matthew Brown's work on Dewey's philosophy of science, Peter Godfrey-Smith's discussions of Dewey's Naturalism and Realism, and the most vocal recent defender of Dewey, Philip Kitcher, whose work defends Dewey's metaphilosophy briefly mentioned above. Further reading recommendations in addition to the list of Dewey books given at the end (which is somewhat overwhelming even for seasoned readers) might have helped readers looking for more but unsure where to turn next. These are small points that take nothing away from the usefulness of this introduction. Those coming to Dewey's views for the first time will find a clear, even-handed account of his philosophy, one that does well in highlighting his major philosophical commitments and their continuing significance for us now.

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