

INTRODUCTION TO *DEWEY* *STUDIES*

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Sponsored by the John Dewey Society, *Dewey Studies* represents the first journal ever dedicated exclusively to scholarship on the philosophy of John Dewey.¹ Because there has been so much work on Dewey's philosophy of education, *Dewey Studies* will deliberately extend to all aspects of Dewey's work outside of his philosophy of education narrowly considered. The founding of *Dewey Studies* is an important moment in the history of both the Society and Deweyan scholarship.

The visitor to the John Dewey Society homepage is provided the following brief history:

The John Dewey Society grew out of a series of discussions held in 1934 and 1935. Originally called "The Association for the Study of Education in its Social Aspects," the name was changed to the John Dewey Society in early 1936. The John Dewey Society exists to keep alive John Dewey's commitment to the use of critical and reflective intelligence in the search for solutions to crucial problems in education and culture.²

The Society was founded on Dewey's spirit *not* as a venue of Dewey studies. The interested browser can click on "history" under "About

¹ In authoring this article, I contacted the following former John Dewey Society past-presidents listed in the order in which they served: David Hansen, Larry Hickman, Lynda Stone, Deron Boyles, and Kathleen Knight-Abowitz to solicit insight into the founding of the journal. I also contacted president-elect A. G. Rud. The current president, Leonard J. Waks was not contacted because he is the inaugural editor-in-chief. All of them endorsed the idea of *Dewey Studies*. As one of them put it, "Hmmm, where has a journal like this been all this time?" They also offered useful ideas for the composition of my Introduction. I borrowed from every one of them. Their influence is scattered throughout the work without citation. I want to thank them for their help. Errors that remain are all my own.

² Retrieved from

<http://www.johndeweyociety.org/board-of-directors-and-officers/history/>, at 10:58 a.m., January 5, 2017. Due to the largess of Daniel Tanner, a past-president of the Society, every new member receives a copy of Tanner's *Crusade for Democracy: Progressive Education at the Crossroads*, which provides a fine history of the early decades of the Society.

us” to find the following:

In the February 1936 issue of *The Social Frontier*, the name choice was explained:

The new society was named for John Dewey, not because the founders wished to devote themselves to an exposition of the teachings of America’s greatest educator and thinker, but rather because they felt that in his life and work he represents the soundest and most hopeful approach to the study of the problems of education. For more than a generation he has proclaimed the social nature of the educative process and emphasized the close interdependence of school and society. Presumably, without being bound by his philosophy, the John Dewey Society will work out of the tradition which John Dewey has done more than any other person to create. Such an organization is badly needed in America today.³

The John Dewey Society is still much needed for all of these reasons.

Since its founding in 1976 until very recently, *Education and Culture* has been the society’s only publication. It “takes an integrated view of philosophical, historical, and sociological issues in education.”⁴ Meanwhile the much more recent *Journal of School & Society* (founded 2014) provides “a space for free interchanges among scholar-practitioners towards the development of knowledge which can provide direction and meaning for educational projects, contexts and classrooms of all kinds.”⁵ Both of these publications have and

³ Retrieved from
<http://www.johndeweyociety.org/board-of-directors-and-officers/history/>,
at 10:59 a.m., January 5, 2017.

⁴ Retrieved from the journal’s website, <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/eandc/>,
at 11:01 a.m., January 5, 2017.

⁵ Retrieved from the journal’s website,
<http://www.johndeweyociety.org/the-journal-of-school-and-society/>,
at 11:35, January 5, 2017.

will continue to serve the historical mission of the Society very well.

However, in recent years the Society and its membership are publically identified with scholarship focused specifically on John Dewey. It is a sign of the robustness of the Society that it can maintain two first-rate journals devoted to its historical mission while expanding its reach to founding the first journal committed entirely to scholarship on the work of John Dewey. By defining a space solely devoted to Dewey scholarship outside education, the Society also helps the *Journal of School & Society* and *Education and Culture* better define their own mission in the minds of the members of the Society as well as their many other readers.

There has been a long and unbroken line of scholarship on Dewey's philosophy of education, especially in the field of education, beginning no later than his first published work of length on the topic, *The School and Society* (1899). Philosophers of education have several first rate journals with an international readership. These journals often contain papers about Dewey's philosophy of education and commonly other aspects of Dewey's philosophy as they apply to education. It would be hard to find an issue of any of these journals that did not have a least one article that makes some use or at least reference to Dewey, even if only to oppose him. However, if the other aspects of Dewey's philosophy, aesthetics, ethics, logic, epistemology, and such find expression in these journals, they are uncomfortably "shoehorned in" as enlightening tangents to educational topics.

Meanwhile, there are dozens if not hundreds of educational journals worldwide that often feature articles about Dewey or at least frequently contain papers referring to his work in some way or another. There is simply no need for a journal dedicated to publishing work exclusively on Dewey's philosophy of education. There is, however, a demand for a journal in which educational topics are perhaps an edifying tangent to the study of other aspects of Dewey's holistic philosophy. Educators, the philosophical community, and the other disciplines and fields influenced by Dewey will be better for the founding of *Dewey Studies*.

Turning to the broader philosophical reach of Deweyan

studies it is important to realize that pragmatism, including Deweyan pragmatism, was never dominant in North American universities. Philosophy professionalized at the *fin de siècle* of the nineteenth century. The American Philosophical Association was established in 1900. The *Philosophical Review* was established in 1892 and the *Journal of Philosophy, Psychology, and Scientific Methods* in 1904. The model was that of the great German research universities and the emphasis was on appearing scientific, meaning disengaged from everyday cares, concerns, and practices.

In conjunction with the general epistemological orientation of modern philosophy, a large comprehensive philosophy, such as pragmatism, eager to engage everyday social, political, economic, educational, existential, historical, and religious issues with a strong reformist slant was incompatible with the times. Significantly, Dewey's first publication was in *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* founded in 1867 not by academic professionals, but people (i.e., the St. Louis Hegelians) who were actively involved in politics, business, the trades, and such.

The influx of logical positivists escaping fascist Europe during the 1930's established linguistic oriented philosophy in North American graduate schools. The linguistic philosophy of Cambridge and Oxford, especially as found in the work of the later Ludwig Wittgenstein, supplemented this orientation. What came to be called "analytic philosophy" has dominated American philosophy departments ever since. Analytic philosophy is compatible with the logical, objectivist, scientific orientation detached from everyday practical concerns and social reform that has dominated academic philosophy in North America from the start.

Much of the contemporary interest in Dewey was spurred by the publication of Richard Rorty's 1979 *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. This work draws Dewey together with the later Wittgenstein and the continental philosopher Martin Heidegger (who also had more impact on North American departments of philosophy than the thought of Dewey).

However helpful in reviving interest in Dewey, Rorty and the neopragmatists that followed him such as Robert Brandom and

John McDowell remain loyal to the linguistic turn in philosophy and therefore slight the role of experience in Dewey's classical pragmatism. The debate between classical and neopragmatism is far from over and we may expect some of it to play out in the pages of *Dewey Studies*. Rorty famously said, "James and Dewey were not only waiting at the end of the dialectical road which analytic philosophy traveled, but are waiting at the end of the road which, for example, Foucault and Deleuze are currently traveling."⁶ There is *William James Studies* and now a *Dewey Studies* to help us get further down the road wherever it may lead.

The Center for Dewey Studies published *The Collected Works of John Dewey* (1967-1990) in thirty-seven volumes under the directorship of the late Jo Ann Boydston who also edited and independently published *The Poems of John Dewey* (1977). Under the directorship of Larry A. Hickman, the Center also published: *The Correspondence of John Dewey* in four electronic volumes (completed in 1997), an electronic edition of *The Collected Works*, and *The Class Lectures of John Dewey*. The Center for Dewey Studies at Southern Illinois University is unstaffed as of January 1, 2017. The Center was in the process of electronically transcribing, proofreading, and editing Dewey's *Lectures in China* at the time of its closing. A large array of scholarly resources is in place due to decades of fine work at the Center. It will remain the premier archive for scholarship on Dewey, but for now at least it is no longer actively functioning as a staffed center of active research that regularly hosts visiting scholars.⁷ *Dewey Studies* arrives just in time to help fill the void left by the Center's reduction to a passive archive.

Fortunately, over the last two decades under the guidance of Larry Hickman, the Center for Dewey Studies has collaborated in the formation of numerous Dewey Centers worldwide, including: Germany (Cologne), Italy (Calabria), France (Paris), Ireland

⁶ Richard Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), xviii.

⁷ I would like to thank Thomas M. Alexander who, along with Paula Anders McNally, has served as co-director of the Center (since the retirement of Larry Hickman in 2015), for his review and correction of the foregoing paragraph.

(Dublin), Poland (Krakow), and China (Shanghai) among others. It is propitious that *Dewey Studies* goes into publication just as Dewey scholarship becomes truly global in scope.

At the conclusion of his autobiographical essay "From Absolutism to Experimentalism," Dewey insists:

I think it shows a deplorable deadness of imagination to suppose that philosophy will indefinitely revolve within the scope of the problems and systems that two thousand years of European history have bequeathed to us. Seen in the long perspective of the future, the whole of western European history is a provincial episode.⁸

Dewey Studies should serve as a vehicle for escaping philosophical provincialism. No one knows the future of Deweyan studies, but surely it will be an adventure.

The establishment of a journal entirely dedicated to the full range of Dewey's expansive philosophy *sans* education is long overdue. As one of those I consulted (see fn. 1) indicated: "Dewey has been anxiously guarded by educational theorists But Dewey's work has never belonged to education or any other singular professional field." Very true! Beyond the field of education, Dewey's thought remains influential in fields and disciplines as diverse as psychology, political science, social theory, culture studies, ethics, logic, metaphysics, aesthetics, anthropology, neuropragmatism, and many more. He truly pursued the love of wisdom wherever the journey took him. *Dewey Studies* will provide a forum for scholars from many fields and disciplines to report results from their own pursuits.

⁸ John Dewey, *The Collected Works of John Dewey, 1882-1953*, ed. by Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1967-1990), LW 5:159.

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