Introduction*

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John Dewey was born in Burlington, Vermont on 20 October 1859 and died in New York City on 1 June 1952. This issue of the journal celebrates his life and the 150th anniversary of his birth. It also represents the commemoration of this anniversary by the John Dewey Society (founded 1936). All contributors are members of the Society selected for their diversity of interests in Dewey’s philosophy as well as differing interpretations of his work.

Born before the Civil War (in which his father served) and dying during the Korean conflict in the Cold War, his life spanned a tumultuous time in U.S. and world history in which he was a prominent domestic and global figure. Besides his many academic books and publications, Dewey wrote hundreds of pieces for the popular press, including The Atlantic Monthly, Ladies Home Journal, The Nation, The New Republic, The New York Times, and such widely read educational journals as Teachers College Record, The Social Frontier, and the Journal of the National Education Association. As a social activist, he was involved in the founding of the American Association of University Professors, American Civil Liberties Union, and the New York City Teachers Union and he presided at the trial of Leon Trotsky, among many other involvements.

For decades, he was America’s most public intellectual, perhaps the most uncloistered and wide-ranging thinker in the history of the nation. A truly cosmopolitan philosopher, his ninetieth birthday was formally celebrated in Canada, Denmark, England, France, Holland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Norway, Sweden, and Turkey as well as the United States. The ninetieth birthday fund committee, designed to raise $90,000 for Dewey to donate as he saw fit, received contributions from people as diverse as cartoonist Al Capp, Justice Hugo Black, Harvard president James B. Conant, union leader David Dubinsky, entertainer Jimmy Durante,

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Albert Einstein, and the actor Douglas Fairbanks, Jr. The first message read at his birthday dinner was from President Truman. The prime minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, attended while Justice Felix Frankfurter spoke to an assembly of some five hundred. At the Columbia University celebration, Dwight D. Eisenhower, president of the University and future U.S. president, called him “the philosopher of freedom.” This issue of the journal celebrates another birthday sixty years later at a time when, once again, Dewey’s philosophical reach is global.

Dewey’s grasp was as great as his reach. He made enduring contributions to all the major domains of philosophical study including, logic, aesthetics, metaphysics, ethics, political philosophy, philosophy of religion, and such. He made major contributions in psychology as the leader of the Chicago School of functionalism. He was elected president of the American Psychological Association (1899) before he was president of the American Philosophical Association (1905). He was also world renowned for his original thinking about education, declaring in his monumental *Democracy and Education* that “philosophy may even be defined as the general theory of education.”

Often called the philosopher of reconstruction, he reconstructed his thought slowly but steadily in his lifetime, moving from Hegelian objective idealism to experimental naturalism and pragmatism. The context and course of events sometimes led him to dramatically change his mind, as when he recognized his mistake in supporting WWI and became a leader in the Outlawry of War movement. Today, in the Deweyan spirit, we must critically recover and reconstruct Dewey for our time. It is our hope that the present issue will prove a valuable contribution to this goal. With this end in mind, we have asked each contributor to provide “reflections for the twenty-first century.” In an effort to create a temporal mirror on our times, we will provide a brief historical contextualization for each contribution before leaving it to readers to draw out their own connections and conclusions.

When Nel Noddings suggests “A Common Faith is arguably one of John Dewey’s least effective books,” she is probably right. It was a rhetorical failure that convinced few people who read it then or more recently. The typical response of friends and foe alike assumes a rather narrow list of pre-existing categories of possible religious beliefs or expression, and then relegates Dewey to one or another place in the existing conversation, after which they praise or condemn him according to their preferences. Many seriously misunderstood him. In a review of Dewey’s book, the prominent liberal theologian Henry Wieman interpreted him as believing in the superhuman, if not the supernatural, such that Dewey “pronounces non-theistic humanism as futile and mistaken.” For his part, Dewey saw all forms of theism as simply a hypostatization of an abstract noun that expresses humankind’s highest ideals (and not an antecedently existing Being). Dewey preferred imagined ideals that “intervene” in the world to guide judicious, ameliorative action rather than those that “supervene” from beyond to bring metaphysical comfort and escape from the practical problem of acting to secure enduring ameliorative values.
The problem then, as now, is that Dewey attempts to occupy a unique place, a distinct topos (locus, place, position) in the classical Greek sense, so he can approach the topic in a remarkably new way. After seventy-five years, it remains unclear to most whether such a place exists in the religious conversation, which is something Noddings’s paper carefully documents. For some, Dewey’s position is, in the etymological sense, a utopia (no place).

In response to Wieman’s review, Edwin Ewart Aubrey assembled an abundance of evidence that Dewey was, in fact, a “non-theistic humanist.” Dewey proclaimed his “complete approval of Mr. Aubrey’s statement of my position.” As Steven C. Rockefeller shows in his monumental work on Dewey’s philosophy of religion, Dewey is a naturalistic, religious humanist who eschews both secular reductive materialism and the hypostatization of religious ideals. Such a stance is sure to alienate the two dominant camps in current religious discourse—the secularist and the humanist—as both see religious humanism as an almost impossible position to occupy.

Dewey rejected the dogmatic religious identification of the real and the ideal as an antecedent given that completes the quest for religious certainty. He did not think religion had any special access to truths closed off from the evolving methods of the sciences. Indeed, he did not think there was any special domain of the religious at all. For him, any domain of experience can have the qualities of immediate, consummatory religious, and even mystical, noncognitive sense of being a part of a larger whole in which each of us can make a creative contribution. For Dewey, the religious experience is quite close to the aesthetic experience, which is why both feeling and imagination are so important to it. He did think that our highest imaginary ideals were possibilities that might be actualized through intelligent inquiry, thereby naturalistically unifying the ideal and the real for a time within an ever-evolving Darwinian universe.

Dewey sought to establish something like a civic religion, a common sense of religiosity appropriate for the public sphere and untrammeled by the partisanship of parochial dogma. Traditionally, religion has been divisive. Dewey hoped to harness a common faith around ideals of democracy, social justice, and amelioration. Some think this can be done while many do not. Noddings’s paper raises some serious questions that anyone interested in the very possibility of religion, much less civic religion, must answer for themselves.

Like Nel Noddings, Larry Hickman looks carefully at Dewey’s A Common Faith in a contemporary context. Whereas Noddings situates Dewey within contemporary writing about religion, faith, and reason, Hickman relies on recent research from the Pew Research Center. He uses the research questions that drove the research in conjunction with the results to create a useful discursive space for reaching his conclusions. Many readers will find his distinction between secularism, which he claims actually helps defend religious choice, and secularization, wherein religious considerations “cease to function as central factors in the lives of individuals,” an engaging idea.
Unlike Noddings, Hickman thinks that Dewey’s book succeeds philosophically, even if it has yet to satisfy many readers, whether religious or not. He also seems to suggest that the flux of history is on Dewey’s side and that his religious speculations might yet achieve widespread popularity. Only time will tell. Taken together these papers provide the kind of comparison and contrast that introduces Dewey’s philosophy of religion and its usefulness for democratic purposes in ways that should prove valuable to contemporary readers.

Dewey is a philosopher of culture and Gert Biesta correctly approaches his thinking about scientific inquiry as a response to the crisis of modern culture. The crisis arises because modern science depicts a world apart from human purposes, values, morality, and aesthetic sensibility. It portrays human feelings as distorting objectivity and imagination as confusing the real with the merely possible. At the core of this crisis lie such dualisms as those between subject (subjective) versus object (objective) and the knower versus the known. Dewey the Darwinian overcomes these dualisms by understanding human nature as participating in co-evolving transactions with the rest of nature.

Biesta devotes insightful sections of his essay to explicating Dewey’s participatory and transactional realism while calling attention to many of the crucial ideas in Dewey’s view of science that his critics often overlook. Among others Biesta mentions are Dewey’s emphasis on avoiding different kinds of dualism (e.g., mind versus matter and fact versus value), eschewing the “intellectualist fallacy” of assuming our primary or only relation to reality is the cognitive (knowing) relation, his recognition that scientific knowledge is only one kind of knowledge, his insistence on the continuity between common sense inquiry and esoteric science, and his fallibilism. Other things astutely discussed in Biesta’s paper, but not explicitly named, include what Dewey calls “the philosophic fallacy” (i.e., the mistake of confusing the consequential products of our inquiry with antecedent reality) as well as Dewey’s claim that all inquiry is theory and value laden. Above all, Biesta discusses Dewey’s quest to frame a philosophy of science intimately connected to moral and political affairs.

Dewey’s single most powerful idea for responding to the crisis of culture is democracy. He declares: “The crisis in democracy demands the substitution of intelligence that is exemplified in scientific procedure for the kind of intelligence that is now accepted.” The notion of intelligence Dewey wishes to overcome is the one that considers it “an individual possession.” Dewey also wished to overcome the associated notion that there is an antecedently existing rationality apart from existence found in either a transcendent (Platonic) or transcendental (Kantian) realm.

Dewey rejected many of the dogmas of modern liberalism along with the rationalist dogmas of enlightenment rationality. These include the notion of the atomistic individual born with innate free will, rights, and rationality. Freedom, rights, and rationality (Dewey much preferred the word intelligence) are all cultural achievements, not antecedent givens. He indicates, “Intelligence is the key to freedom in act.” We must use intelligence to transform the environment that, transactionally,
controls our conduct if we are to secure freedom and rights. Dewey would never ignore material conditions. By clarifying Dewey’s thinking about scientific inquiry as a response to the crisis of modernity, Biesta also helps clarify Dewey’s thinking about the crisis of democracy and the democratic individual.

Beginning in the 1920s, Dewey became increasingly worried that the work of the sciences, especially the social sciences, was becoming the province of a small set of specialists who turned their results over to bureaucratic experts. The result is what we today call technocratic government. Increasingly, the result has been government for, but not by, the people. Robert Westbrook observes, for Dewey, “[a] community was not fully democratic until it had ‘socialized intelligence.’”¹¹ Dewey’s commitments to communication and deliberation lie at the core of this call for participatory democracy. Dewey’s oft-used phrase, social intelligence, binds the two together. In today’s world, scientific understanding drives deliberation. Whatever the sciences may mean for the future of capitalism, they mean even more for the future of democracy. Democracy requires first-rate science education, but in the kind of science that overcomes the crisis of democratic modernity.

For Dewey, the move from Gert Biesta’s paper on science to Craig A. Cunningham’s paper on educational technology does not involve a shift from pure to applied science. Dewey writes: “The reproduction of the order of natural changes and the perception of that order were at first close together, so close that no distinction existed between art and science. They were both called techne.”¹² Dewey the pragmatist finds no such dualism. Dewey held a production account of knowing. He observes, “In outward forms, experimental science is infinitely varied. In principle, it is simple. We know an object when we know how it is made, and we know how it is made in the degree in which we ourselves make it.”¹³ As Dewey indicates, the tradition of “maker’s knowledge” is ancient, and if Jaakko Hintikka is right, it includes “doer’s knowledge,” for “no distinction between poiesis and praxis is intended.”¹⁴ Hintikka goes on to show that in this tradition the distinction between practical and theoretical reason is also “ambiguous” and may not be sharply drawn. This is Dewey’s stance as well. Although influenced by Aristotle, Dewey is as unwilling to allow classical distinctions between value-spheres theoria (pure wisdom), phronesis (practical wisdom), and techne (craft, skill, art) and their respective actions: episteme (contemplative action, pure knowing), praxis (practical action, overt doing), and poiesis (productive action) to harden into alienating cultural diremptions. Dewey does the same with the modern cultural partitions (science, ethics, and aesthetics). Mutual interrogation of all domains of experience is philosophy as cultural criticism. The kinds of questions that Cunningham asks about the use of technology in the penultimate paragraph of his paper provide a practical example.

There is something else important about technology for Dewey. We cannot use technologies (tools) without them altering our personal and cultural identity. They transform the customs of a culture and the habits of individual bodies. To learn a technology, we must acquire the habits of their use. For Dewey, these habits consti-
He calls tools “extra-organic” organs, “that is to say, all the tools and devices of all the arts, although outside the body, operate in behalf of the functions of life just as do the eye, stomach, hands, and so on.” Indeed, extra-organic organs provide a great spur to the exercise of individual and cultural intelligence.

Tools may be regarded as a sort of extension of the bodily organs. But the growing use of the latter opens a new line of development so important in its consequences that it is worthwhile to give it distinctive recognition. It is the discovery and use of extra-organic tools that has made possible, both in the history of the race and of the individual, complicated activities of a long duration—that is, with results that are long postponed. And, as we have already seen, it is this prolongation and postponement that requires an increasing use of intelligence.

Nowhere today does our democracy need to open up new lines of development of intelligence more than in the use of digital technologies. This is especially the case in the use of instructional technologies in transforming schooling, which is why Cunningham’s essay is so important.

Since Dewey’s philosophy of technology is his philosophy of science, technology also intimately connects to moral and political affairs in the ways indicated by Biesta. Cunningham’s advocacy of “participatory learning” is very much in line with Dewey’s thinking about communicative and deliberative democracy. Dewey asserts: “Ultimate moral motives and forces are nothing more or less than social intelligence—the power of observing and comprehending social situations,—and social power—trained capacities of control—at work in the service of social interest and aims.” Cunningham identifies emergent forms of technology and their remarkable educational potential. Training in the use of these new technologies yield new capacities of control in accordance with new social interests and aims. They are marvelous new ways of educating social intelligence—and a new kind of democratic citizen. What Cunningham calls “participatory learning” is a good way of learning participatory democracy.

Cunningham calls attention to the emphasis Dewey puts on learning “through occupations.” Work involves the forms of life available to a culture for transforming nature to satisfy human purposes, which is why learning through the occupations is so important. Cunningham places special emphasis on massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMPORGs) as expressing well the additive and synergistic characteristics of emergent educational technologies. Clearly, MMPORGs have tremendous capacity for developing social intelligence, as do “distant communications” and “social networking” that he mentions and that, as Cunningham puts it, facilitate participation “in a wide variety of socially mediated learning activities that could never be imagined in Dewey’s day.”

The paper by Jiwon Kim focuses upon what she sees as the dilemma of moral education today. How do we make it more effective? One way to do this is to look to aesthetic experience as consummatory the way that Dewey did and continuous with moral experience. Each is enjoyable, responsive, and sensitive to a situation, and here the aesthetic and cognitive are brought together, whereas they are usually
seen as separate. Kim sees Dewey’s principle of continuity informing this way of thinking. Mind and body then become abstractions from the whole, and embodied intelligence and empathy for others allows one to see and imagine different possibilities. Dewey, in his late work, *Art as Experience*, points out that imagination is the chief instrument of the good,\(^{20}\) allowing us to more fully remove prejudice by appreciating each person’s as unique and irredicible.

John Dewey left for a relatively short trip to Japan and China in 1919 with his wife Alice, and ended up spending three months in Japan, followed by two years in China. Chinese collectivism and their notion of community deeply influenced his thought. Hongmei Peng reflects upon her arrival in the United States and the differing notions of community that she saw, East and West, and looks to Dewey to help her understand community. For Dewey, community is not an aggregation, or a congeries. Bonds among community members are more than formal, they are material and spiritual. Dewey’s democracy is built upon communication, and likewise Peng finds this the case. For her, community is based upon inclusive and what she aptly calls porous communication. It is, as Peng uses Dewey’s metaphor, “a self-tended garden without a fence” because the garden itself is not discrete or separate, but is the world itself. The question this begs is, how do we share, and what do we share? It is necessary to share and share alike to make the foundation of our individual development a social milieu. Peng sees in Deweyan community a way to address conflict in today’s world: Face conflict and resolve it through amicable and respectful discussion. She advocates that we acknowledge Dewey’s idea of an interdependency of individual and community needed today.

Barbara Stengel finds different though related lessons from John Dewey in her paper. She sees that Dewey’s ideas about the other, intelligence, and the is/ought distinction in ethics form the thought of contemporary critical theorists, feminists, and scientists, respectively. That Dewey’s thought is viewed statically rather than dynamically by such thinkers today contributes to a cultural and philosophical amnesia. Like David Hansen and Leonard Waks, Stengel sees Dewey as a model for a cosmopolitanism necessary for interacting and flourishing in today’s world. Dewey actively sought out associations with others who differed from him. As Stengel says pithily: “Consider Dewey’s travels to Japan, to China, to Russia. He didn’t go to speak. He went to live. For several years around 1920 and for periods of several months at other times, Dewey (with and without his various family members) lived outside the United States.” He lived abroad for extended periods of time, most notably in China, but he also cultivated others at home. As Stengel and others have pointed out elsewhere, Dewey had a wide assortment of friends, correspondents, and associates. He learned from strong women, particularly his first wife Alice and also Jane Addams, as well as numerous correspondents. The somatic healer F. Matthias Alexander assuaged his aches and pains while providing Dewey with further data to affirm his disagreement with any mind/body dualisms. Dewey’s Hegelian intellectual roots are evident in his stress upon the both/and over the either/or in his logic, and an embodied way of thinking to always check
back to experience, nature, and the lived world. However, she reminds us to take to heart the friendly critique of Myles Horton, civil rights activist and founder of the Highlander Center in Tennessee. Horton acknowledged his indebtedness to Dewey for the path-breaking work Horton undertook for community education and civil rights, but denied discipleship. Socrates wished for no followers, and Albert Schweitzer suggested the same with his statement to others that one finds one’s own Lambaréné as he did by establishing a hospital in that Gabonese river town. Stengel affirms that Dewey tells us much that is valuable 150 years after his birth and asks us to cut him some conceptual slack, to linger with him. To linger with Dewey may mean to listen to what he says, but certainly to deconstruct and reconstruct what he says for our time.

We now live in an era of globalization. One of the concerns about such a state of the world is, ironically, that powerful and singular cultural groups will dictate the terms of this synthesis. Globalization then becomes a synonym for Americanization, where a flattening of cultural practices and contributions blend us all into a large, corporate, transnational culture with little specificity. We can point to commonplace examples of American corporate reach around the world, of McDonald’s restaurants in Beijing or a WalMart opening in Accra. Naoko Saito is concerned about such American cultural imperialism, but goes deeper than that in her paper. She wants to revive pragmatism for our time to account not only for the cultural imperialism of corporate influence, but also the despair of democratic practice, what she terms following, respectively, Emerson and Thoreau, a “silent melancholy” and “quiet desperation.” Both Thoreau and Emerson saw the promise of democratic enactment as well as the hollow sense of what passes for democratic participation. They followed the concerns of Tocqueville about the flaccidity and fragility of the democratic impulse and practice in the early republic. The erosion of the presence and influence of propertied farmers troubled Thomas Jefferson in his final years in the early nineteenth century. He thought that the incipient move to urbanized and mechanized labor was detrimental to the kind of participation he envisioned for the new republic he helped to launch. Yet it was Thoreau who noted the mental and spiritual sloth about him, and stated on the title page of Walden, “I do not propose to write an ode to dejection, but to brag as lustily as chanticleer in the morning, standing on his roost, if only to wake my neighbors up.”

Saito stresses the roots of American transcendentalism in Dewey, particularly Emerson, and what she calls, following Stanley Cavell, Emersonian moral perfectionism. Democracy is always underway, impassioned and aimed toward a perfect or ideal state in this view, which Thoreau captures more lyrically. It is Emerson, too, that Saito uses to “destabilize” Deweyan pragmatism. She finds the emphasis upon face-to-face democracy and the solving of problems facile and failing to capture how humans actually relate to the other. Saito believes that Dewey’s call for creative democracy “must be addressed also towards the need for humility in the face of alterity, in the face of the strangeness of the eccentric, both outside and inside of one’s own home, such as to resist the lure of assimilating difference into the
same.” It is Emerson’s “devil’s child” who jars any common or banal understanding of self and other, as being something as commonplace as another person or an unacknowledged part of the self. Dewey’s own encounters with the eccentric have been discussed recently as well as how much he learned from key women in his life, such as his wife Alice and Jane Addams. Saito helps us to see what efforts must be made to reconstruct Dewey for our time.

Recognized for its centrality to Dewey’s thought, the term reconstruction appears at times across the essays and introductions in the present volume. While Leonard Waks and David Hansen only use it each one time, it seems an appropriate frame to their significant papers on considering Dewey and his philosophy as cosmopolitan. In the new introduction from the late forties to the programmatic essay, Reconstruction in Philosophy, originally published in 1920, Dewey poses a relationship of reconstruction to philosophy thus:

Today Reconstruction of Philosophy is a more suitable title than Reconstruction in Philosophy. For the intervening events have sharply defined . . . the basic postulate of the text: namely that the distinctive office, problems and subject matter of philosophy grow out of stresses and strains in community life in which a given form of philosophy arises, and that, accordingly, its specific problems vary with the changes in human life that are always going on.

Given historical change, new times since the twenties, and at the least different dimensions to problems of community, Waks and Hansen offer “reconstructions.” In general, they undertake “social philosophy,” according to and applying Hickman, posing “reinterpretation . . . [i.e., timely reevaluation] of Dewey’s basic insights . . . [for] a new generation.” At the least they see, as Waks put it, a cosmopolitan strain in Dewey that is useful for today.

Consideration of contemporary writings, herein especially by Waks and Hansen, demonstrates that there are various approaches with differentiated methods to interpreting Dewey. In a recent text, Hickman identifies two “research programs” in American pragmatism as classical and neo-pragmatist; two others that seem viable are neo-classical and historicist. Classical and what might be termed neo-classical readings take Dewey in word and spirit, utilizing his direct writings from yesterday for projects today. As do most scholars, Waks and Hansen employ him thus; their distinctions come in form and degree of citation and synthesis. Each represents standard contemporary accounts and each makes good use of present-day sources to bolster their positions. Waks offers greater textual evidence for his view and becomes neo-classical in an emphasis on Dewey’s late notion of “agency through art.” Hansen posits greater synthesis as he applies a Dewey with “deep and abiding interest in the world writ large” to politics and especially education. Both rely somewhat on neo-pragmatist reference; this is illustrated in Waks’s critique of K. Anthony Appiah’s version of cosmopolitanism and indeed his return to Dewey as more concrete and practical. With Hansen’s substantive support as more wide-ranging, each formulation is strong.
What draws Waks and Hansen together is their recognition that Dewey’s cosmopolitanism is connected to democracy and thus to education; indeed the most direct statement comes from his central and familiar text. What is interesting for all three is the question of the relationship of democracy and cosmopolitanism. In answer a first historical point is that any concept of cosmopolitanism has not always—and only recently—relied on democracy. Perhaps the second and historicist point is that today’s “wide and free society,” cosmopolitan as defined by Dewey, must be democratic to be cosmopolitan and must be cosmopolitan to be democratic. Recall that Dewey’s criteria for democracy are two in tandem, the first exclusive communitarian depth of association along with more extensive and inclusive ones of interest and action. Intervening events that led to the postmodern, globalized world, with all of its complexities, fluidities, crises and the like in which we now live, demand no less. These contributions from Waks and Hansen surely are in accord in this 150th birthday celebration of Dewey.

Notes

1. Our description of the details of Dewey’s ninetieth birthday celebration is drawn primarily from Martin, *The Education of John Dewey*.
2. MW 9: 338.
3. For Wieman’s review, see LW 9: 426-434. Others concluded Dewey was simply a theist in spite of his staunch naturalist rejection of the supernatural. See Norbert Guterman, LW 9: 423-425.
4. For Aubrey’s review, see LW 9: 435-437.
5. For Dewey’s reply to both Wieman and Aubrey, see LW 9: 226.
7. For instance, see LW 10: 199.
8. LW 11: 51.
10. MW 14: 210,
12. LW 10: 154; see also LW 3: 25. Significantly, Dewey says much the same thing in his 1938 *Logic*; see LW 12: 77.
15. MW 14: 21.
17. MW 7: 188. Understanding tools as “extra-organic” organs also help us better understand Dewey’s instrumentalism: “There is nothing novel nor heterodox in the notion that thinking is instrumental. The very word is redolent of an *Organum*—whether novum or veterum” (MW 10: 368). The classical Greek word *organum* means organ as well as instrument.
22. MW12: 256.
24. Hickman, *Pragmatism as Post-Postmodernism*.
25. The work of historians considering Dewey may well offer additional categories. See Popkewitz, *Inventing the Modern Self*.

**References**


