Editor’s Note

Dewey Across the Disciplines

Welcome, readers, to volume 28, issue 1 of Education and Culture. As usual, we have a selection of articles in this issue that reflect both the depth and breadth of Dewey’s philosophy, or as he famously called it in Democracy and Education, “the general theory of education.” In the Deweyan spirit, all of our authors draw on multiple disciplines and their adherents to help us wrestle with problems and questions critical to issues in philosophy and/as education today.

We begin with Barbara Thayer-Bacon’s “Maria Montessori, John Dewey, and William H. Kilpatrick,” which passionately calls us to rethink the significance of Montessori’s research and writing for education and democracy today, especially in light of her strong resonances with Dewey but dismissive treatment by prominent American academics of the day, including Dewey’s former student, William H. Kilpatrick. It is thus Thayer-Bacon’s hope that “knowing [Montessori’s] story in its complexity within today’s context will help draw attention to her work” and its significant contemporary value. John Freeman-Moir then creates a fruitful dialogue between Dewey and William Morris in “William Morris and John Dewey: Imagining Utopian Education.” Examining certain utopian impulses in Dewey and Morris, Freeman-Moir argues provocatively that both thinkers “imagined ways of living that would be radically more desirable than that which capitalist civilization and culture can provide for, and that each thought could be realizable.” Moreover, he suggests that this utopian impulse “stems from their belief that utopian experience is crafted and is thus a matter of practice.”

Our second pair of articles takes on two themes of increasing interest of late among Dewey scholars: 1) Dewey’s thinking about aesthetic experience and the arts, and 2) the “permanent deposit” of Hegelian philosophy in Dewey’s thinking about human growth, intersubjectivity, and democracy. First, Stephanie A. Baer’s “The Fear of Art and the Art of Fear” explores “the pedagogical potential of fear” in Dewey’s deeply nuanced understanding of educative experience, specifically, in the arts classroom. Drawing on the work of English and Stengel, she contends that
“by recognizing and naming fearful moments in their students’ (and their own) experiences, educators [can] become aware of the places where growth is needed.” Following this, in “Reconstructing Dewey: Dialectics and Democratic Education,” Jeff Jackson looks to “reconstruct Dewey’s argument against external aims, with specifically Hegelian terms, in order to demonstrate how the dialectical conception of experience identified by [James] Good and others can help shed new, important light on Dewey’s case against the focus on grades and test scores in education.” Moreover, he argues that emphasizing the dialectical element in Dewey’s thinking “allows us to better understand how an education which depreciates grading would more effectively encourage students to grow through rigorous, difficult experiences than does the typical grade-based education.”

Lastly, I am pleased to announce that the next edition of Education and Culture will be a special issue focusing on the general theme “Dewey and the Child.” This issue will be co-edited by Maughn Gregory, who currently serves as the Faculty Advisor to the Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children at Montclair State University.

Happy reading!

—David Granger

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