

Some of John Dewey's Writings about Inquiry, Ethics, The Individual and the Community, Education, and Democracy

This annotated reading list is adapted from the introductions to the two-volume **The Essential Dewey**, edited by Larry A. Hickman and Thomas M. Alexander (Indiana University Press,

1998). Standard references to John Dewey's work are to the critical (print) edition, **The Collected Works of John Dewey, 1882-1953**, edited by Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1969-1991), and published in three series as **The Early Works** (EW), **The Middle Works** (MW) and **The Later Works** (LW). These designations are followed by volume and page number. "LW.1.14," for example, refers to **The Later Works**, volume 1, page 14.

In order to insure uniform citations of the critical edition, the pagination of the print edition has been preserved in **The Collected Works of John Dewey, 1882-1953: The Electronic Edition**, edited by Larry A. Hickman (Charlottesville, Virginia: InteLex Corp., 1996).

I. Inquiry

Dewey wrote *How We Think* (originally published in 1910 and revised in 1933) for teachers. Two of its key chapters are chapter seven, "**Analysis of Reflective Thinking**" (LW.8.196-209) and chapter eight, "**The Place of Judgment in Reflective Activity**" (LW.8.210-20). In the first of these essays Dewey characterizes five phases of reflective thought. In the second he elucidates the role of selective emphasis and interpretation in judgment. "**The Pattern of Inquiry**" (LW.12.105-22) develops in a more technical manner the material presented five years earlier in "Analysis of Reflective Thinking."

II. Ethics

Although Dewey was suspicious of the term *value*, because of the tendency of philosophers to reify the qualities of events and objects, he did write a great deal about the activity of *valuation*.

"**The Logic of Judgments of Practice**" (1915 - MW.8.14-82) is a discussion of the type of judgment that has a specific subject matter. Dewey argues that such judgments are not static, as some have suggested, but instead demand a course of action. In the course of his discussion he provides rich examples from epistemology and the philosophy of science to illustrate his central thesis -- that the data of sense perception are not sufficient in themselves, but function as assets in the testing of valued habits and beliefs. In "**Valuation and Experimental Knowledge**" (1922 - MW.13.3-28), Dewey clarifies and extends the arguments that he advanced in the preceding essay. In replying to his critics, he emphasizes that experimental

judgment is oriented not just to the testing of old ideas, but to the creation of new consequences and goods, as well. **"Value, Objective Reference, and Criticism"** (1925 - LW.2.78-97) relates the affective and ideational components of valuation. Dewey here underscores his view that the meaning of an object often changes as it becomes involved in a practical judgment. Taken together, these three essays contain an excellent account of Dewey's treatment of the relation of ends and means.

In **"Philosophies of Freedom"** (1928 - LW.3.92-114) Dewey ties his ethical theory to his naturalism. He characterizes freedom in terms of the enlargement and diversification of choices, as well as their unimpeded operation. Freedom is presented as a relative term. It functions as both a condition and a goal in moral choice. **"Three Independent Factors in Morals"** (1930 - LW.5.278-88) attacks "single principle" moral theories and identifies three independent but intertwined factors in moral decision: goods, rights, and virtues. In **"The Good of Activity"** (1922 - MW.193-203) -- chapter twenty-three of *Human Nature and Conduct* -- Dewey relates his ethical theory to his theory of education, arguing that the test of moral decisions should be the extent to which they are able to liberate and enrich impulses and habits.

The last two essays listed in this section are from the 1932 revision of *Ethics*, which Dewey wrote with James Hayden Tufts. In chapter fourteen, **"Moral Judgment and Knowledge"** (LW.7.262-83), Dewey rejects both extreme moral relativism (the view that moral valuations are strictly conventional or arbitrary) and moral absolutism (the view that a uniform code of morals can be established for all times and places). It is the duty of each generation, he argues, to determine what principles are relevant to its particular situation. In chapter fifteen, **"The Moral Self"** (LW.7.285-309), Dewey emphasizes the naturalistic strain within his ethical theory. To be human is to have impulses and desires, but it is also to be a part of a society in which rights and obligations are institutionalized and in which actions are approved and disapproved by the community. The Good, he argues, should be defined neither in terms of individual impulses nor social obligations as such, but in terms of what is experimentally *approvable*, taking both types of considerations into account.

III. The Individual and the Social

One of the most complex and controversial areas of Dewey's thought concerns his attempts to justify his faith in democracy as a mode of community action. In these essays those attempts are exhibited in full relief within treatments of the public-private distinction, the nature and prospects of liberalism, and the reasons why democracy must be radical in its outlook and purposes.

In "**Search for the Public**" (LW.2.238-58) and "**Search for the Great Community**" (LW.2.325-50) -- chapters one and five respectively of *The Public and Its Problems* (1927) -- Dewey applies his social behaviorism to the problem of distinguishing what is private from what is public, and he examines the role of scientific technology and the arts in the construction of the instrumentalities by means of which associated living can be transformed into the spirit of a "Great Community."

In "**The Inclusive Philosophic Idea**" (1928 - LW.3.41-54) Dewey argues against the Lockean notion of atomic individualism, suggesting instead that political philosophy must take seriously the social as a category. The individual, he argues, can only be properly understood in terms of the social. In a companion piece, "**A Critique of American Civilization**" (1928 - LW.3.133-3 44), Dewey returns to a theme that permeates his social and political philosophy. A civilization is only as strong as its weakest members. It is therefore incumbent on any civilization that wishes to persevere that it establish and nourish institutions that will promote the liberation of the talents and potentialities of all of its citizens. Individualism, he suggests, is something to be worked toward, and not something given in advance. Dewey returns to this theme in "**Renascent Liberalism**" (1935 - LW.11.41-65), which is chapter three of *Liberalism and Social Action*. Written during the depths of the Great Depression, this essay calls for a radical liberalism, that is, one that would make it clear that intelligence is a social asset and that it is social cooperation, and not what Dewey elsewhere calls "ragged individualism," that will have to be honored if progress is to be achieved.

IV. Education

"**My Pedagogic Creed**" (1897 - EW.5.84-95) remains one of the most concise of Dewey's statements of his educational aims. In *The Child and the Curriculum* (1902 - MW.2.273-91), still a classic in its field, Dewey argues against two extremes of educational theory. The first view, held in Dewey's time by W. T. Harris, who was the U.S. Commissioner of Education from 1889 to 1906, is that subject matter should be emphasized at the expense of the child's individual peculiarities. The second, held by psychologist G. Stanley Hall, is that the personality and character of the child are more important than subject matter. Dewey rejects both of these attempts to bifurcate educational practice. He seeks to replace them with a pedagogy that integrates the best elements of each view.

In "**The Moral Training Given by the School Community**" (1909 - MW.4.269-74), chapter two of *Moral Principles in Education*, Dewey presents what takes place in the classroom as an integral part of the activities of the wider community. Two chapters from *Democracy and Education* (1916) further develop these themes. Chapter eight, "**Aims in Education**" (MW.9.107-17), argues that educational aims cannot successfully be imposed upon material from the outside, but must flow from the intelligent practice of teaching and learning. Chapter nine, "**Natural**

Development and Social Efficiency as Aims" (MW.9.118-30), argues that natural development and social efficiency as educational aims must be defined in terms of a larger cultural context, where "culture" is taken as "the capacity for constantly expanding the range and accuracy of one's perception of meanings."

In "**Nationalizing Education**" (1916- MW.202-10) Dewey calls upon teachers to form a bulwark against the forces that would fragment the national culture by fostering fear and hatred of minorities, immigrants, and others who have traditionally been the targets of such demagoguery. A "national" education would recognize both the complexities of its cultural context and its place in a community of nations. "**Education as Engineering**" (1922 - MW.12.323-28) constitutes a call for Americans to devote the same intellectual and financial resources to education that they have to the great projects of scientific technology. Finally, in "**Education in Relation to Form**" (1933- LW.176-82), a selection from chapter five of *How We Think*, Dewey discusses the vital meaning for education of the term "logical." It signifies, he argues, "the *regulation* of natural and spontaneous processes of observation, suggestion, and testing; that is, thinking as an *art*."

V. Democracy

Dewey was known during his lifetime as *the* philosopher of democracy. In "**Democracy Is Radical**" (1937 - LW.11.296-99) Dewey restates some of the ideas set out in *Liberalism and Social Action* in a more popular form. Written during a time when fascism was ascendent in Europe and perceived as attractive by many in the United States, Dewey reminds his readers that democracy is not only a goal, but a means as well. Temporary dictatorship as a means to greater democracy, he argues, is a contradiction in terms.

Finally, in a benchmark essay on the subject, Dewey argues in "**Creative Democracy – The Task Before Us**" (1939 - LW.14.224-30) that democracy is "a way of life controlled by a working faith in the possibilities of human nature." This would involve, in turn, faith in the capacities of each individual, and a faith in education as a means of liberating those capacities.

For Further Reading: Works about Dewey

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Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University, 1939. [Reprinted, with bibliography extended to 1950, by Muriel Murray. New York: Tudor Publishing Co., 1951. Reprinted, La Salle,

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Short List of Interesting Works About Dewey in Relation to the Arts

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Alexander, Thomas M. "Beyond the Death of Art: Community and the Ecology of the Self." In *Philosophy in Experience: American Philosophy in Transition*, edited by Richard E. Hart and Douglas R. Anderson, 175-94. New York: Fordham University Press, 1997.

Alexander, Thomas M. "The Art of Life: Dewey's Aesthetics." In *Reading Dewey: Interpretations for a Postmodern Generation*, edited by Larry A. Hickman, 1-22. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998.

Ames, Van Meter. "John Dewey as Aesthetician." *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 12 (1953): 145-68.

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Ames, Van Meter. "Aesthetic Values in East and West." In *Philosophy and Culture--East and West*, edited by Charles A. Moore, 342-61. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1962.

Eisner, Elliot W. "The Role of Intelligence in the Creation of Art." In *Experiencing Dewey*, edited by Rick Breault and Donna Adair Breault, 106-8. Indianapolis: Kappa Delta Pi, 2005. to Aesthetic J-7.

Hofstadter, Albert. *Truth and Art*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1965.19 (1978): 5-13.

Jackson, Philip W. "John Dewey and the Lessons of Art." New Haven: Yale University Press, *Journal of Art & Design Education*, 23 1998 (2004): 256- 69.

Jacobson, Leon. "Art as Experience and American Visual Art Today." *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 19 (1960): 117-26. [Reply by Lincoln Rothschild, *ibid.*, 471.]Education." International JJJ-8.

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Yoseloff, 1960.Shusterman, Richard. *Pragmatist Aesthetics: Living Beauty, Rethinking Art*. Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 1992.