



Ser. INSTITUTO EN TLAXCALA. STA CRUZ.  
 EL EMINENTE EDUCADOR DR. DEWEY DANDO CONSEJOS  
 A LOS MAESTROS RURALES

### **Dewey in Mexico: An Introduction** by Gregory F. Pappas

John Dewey is the classical American pragmatist that has had the most extensive influence in Latin America. This influence is, in part, because of his memorable visits to Mexico. The first visit was to lecture at the 1926 Summer Session at the National University, following his trip to Europe with Albert Barnes. The second was in 1937 as chair of the Preliminary Commission of Inquiry into the charges brought by Stalin against Trotsky (it became known as "The Dewey Commission").

Through these visits and translations of his works, Dewey had a significant impact in Mexico (and Latin America), but Dewey himself was also impacted by his experiences in Mexico. In a Letter to Max Eastman, Dewey wrote about his visit to Mexico to chair the Trotsky trial, "It was the most interesting single intellectual experience in my life."

In this special volume of the Inter-American Journal of philosophy, scholars from the Americas revisit the historical relation between Dewey and Mexico with the purpose of deriving some philosophical lessons for today. Among the issues explored by the articles are:

## **I. The Dewey-Trotsky Relation**

In 1937, the “American Committee for the Defense of Leon Trotsky” elected Dewey honorary chairman, and then asked him to chair a preliminary commission to investigate Stalin’s charges. In the first two weeks of April, 1937, Dewey repeatedly visited Leon Trotsky’s home in Coyoacan, Mexico and took testimony for his research. There were thirteen hearings at that same place (from April 10 to April 17, 1937). Are there important lessons to be learned today for political philosophy from the historical dialogue between Trotsky and Dewey?

Richard Bernstein, in “Dewey’s Encounter with Trotsky,” examines the impact that Trotsky’s essay entitled “Their Morals and Ours” had on Dewey’s understanding of radical democracy and the relation between democratic ends and democratic means. Likewise, Larry A. Hickman, with a biographical emphasis, focuses on the influence the Trotsky relation had on Dewey’s doctrine of end-means, particularly on how this doctrine played an important part in Dewey’s criticisms of communism. Kevin S. Decker, in his essay “In London Street: The Dewey-Trotsky Encounter in Politics and Praxis,” explores the Dewey-Trotsky relation through by means of how each responds to Marxist philosophy.

## **II. The Dewey-Diego Rivera Relation**

The relation between Diego Rivera, a prominent Mexican painter who has become famous for his murals in Mexico City, Cuernavaca, Chapingo, San Francisco, Detroit, and New York City, and Dewey has received little attention. Aspects of Rivera’s ideas and works of art resonate with Dewey’s aesthetics and views of democracy.

Terrance MacMullen, in “Dividing Walls and Unifying Murals: Diego Rivera and John Dewey on the Restoration of Art within Life,” exams the relation between Rivera’s work and Dewey’s aesthetics. He argues that Rivera’s murals and artwork are examples of how Dewey thought art should be an integral part of human experience that grows out of and speaks to a particular culture without being contained within museum walls.

## **III. The relation between Dewey (and his work) and Mexican Philosophers.**

Some of the most outstanding philosophers in the Spanish-speaking world, and by far the most important philosophers who have translated Dewey’s works are José Gaos, Samuel Ramos, and Eugenio Imáz. What can we learn from examining closely the translations and related commentaries of these Mexican philosophers of Dewey’s work? What philosophical similarities and differences did they have with Dewey’s philosophy?

Santiago Rey, in “Hermeneutic Migrations: José Gaos on Heidegger and Dewey,” focuses, as his title suggests, on the similarities, differences, and relation between

Heidegger's seminal work *Being and Time* and Dewey's wonderful *Experience and Nature* based on the work of Gaos.

#### IV. Dewey, Mexican culture-education, and the Mexican revolution.

Dewey was impressed with what he found in Mexico, especially with the democratic nature of the educational reforms inspired by the Mexican Revolution. He wrote about the

educational development in the rural schools ... it signifies a revolution rather than renaissance. It is not only a revolution for Mexico, but in some respects one of the most important social experiments undertaken anywhere in the world.”[1]

Dewey's Mexican students Moisés Sáenz and Rafael Ramírez, used Dewey's philosophy as part of the post-revolutionary transformation of education. Dewey's indirect role in Mexico is prominent in historical interpretations of twentieth-century Mexico. Mexico's experience with Deweyan philosophy became an important political platform for reform projects in twentieth-century U.S. society. What was the impact of Dewey (and his students) on Mexican education after the Mexican revolution?

Nathan Crick with co-author David Tarvin discuss, in their essay “A Pedagogy of Freedom: John Dewey and Experimental Rural Education,” these topics with regard to the impact that the educational system in rural Mexico had on Dewey's thoughts about education through what they call a “pedagogy of freedom.” Kyle Greenwalt likewise explores the impact of the Mexican revolution on Dewey's thought in his essay “John Dewey in Mexico: Nation-Building, Schooling, and the State.” Greenwalt argues that the revolution not only positively impacted Dewey's views on social reconstruction, but also caused some reticence in Dewey for using state-driven strategies for nation-building, which Greenwalt says are germane issues for further developing our own educational systems and their relations to the local community. Daron Boyles, in “John Dewey's Influence in Mexico: Rural Schooling, ‘Community,’ and the Vitality of Context,” argues for the importance of the historical context of rural Mexico during the 1920s and 1930s for understanding why Dewey's philosophy was so relevant to the educational reform in rural Mexico. Yet Boyles also problematizes the centrality that Dewey played in this reform in light of his connections with Moisés Sáenz, Rafael Ramírez, and José Vasconcelos.

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#### Notes

[1] John Dewey “Mexico's Educational Renaissance,” *The New Republic* (1927), 4, emphasis in the original. Mexico's Secretaría de Educación Pública published

Dewey's essay as "What Mr. John Dewey Thinks of the Educational Policies of Mexico" (Mexico City: Talleres Gráficos de la Nación, 1926).