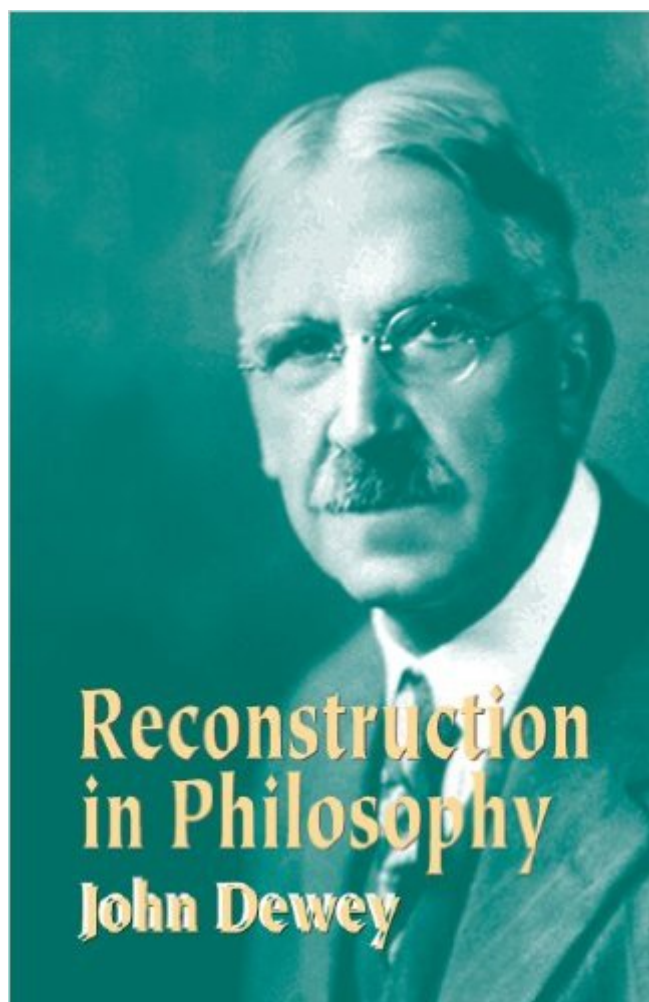


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Reconstruction In Philosophy



Synopsis

"A modern classic. Dewey's lectures have lost none of their vigor | The historical approach, which underlay the central argument, is beautifully exemplified in his treatments of the origin of philosophy." — Philosophy and Phenomenological Research. "It was with this book that Dewey fully launched his campaign for experimental philosophy." — The New Republic. Written shortly after the shattering effects of World War I, John Dewey's *Reconstruction in Philosophy* offers an insightful introduction to the concept of pragmatic humanism. The eminent philosopher presents persuasive arguments against traditional philosophical constructs, suggesting their basis in self-justification; instead, he proposes an examination of core values in terms of their ultimate effects on the self and others. Dewey's experimental philosophy represented a significant departure from its predecessor, utilitarianism, and it was received with both outrage and acclaim for daring to mingle ethics and science. Delivered in 1919 as a series of lectures at Tokyo's Imperial University of Japan, Dewey's landmark work appears here in an enlarged edition that features an informative introduction by the author, written more than 25 years after the book's initial publication.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

John Dewey, as I've heard, was never comfortable with labels. Throughout his career he shifted from and to many rubrics: pragmatism, interactionism, instrumentalism, transactionism, experimentalism. Truth be told, all of these are present in "Reconstruction in Philosophy" and partly because of that, this is probably the best intro to Dewey available. Dewey has a bone to pick with traditional philosophy. Not only has it lost track with real, as opposed to academic, problems

(anyone walking down the street can tell us this) but it never really was that good at depicting real questions and descriptions anyway. Take concepts like Plato's ideal forms and Kant's a priori. Neither of these are tenable in any realm of experience; rather, they were a misguided quest to explain the permanence and stability of the world. Dewey's book is an attempt to pull the carpet out from under their feet; science and inquiry using its methods shows us that the world changes and if anything, stability is something that is felt by us - not inherent in the world. Thus a priori, ideal forms, separation of the noumenal and phenomenal amongst other current 'problems' in philosophy - all based on the idea of permanent/transitory dichotomy - are not only wearing thin, but are fast showing to be irrelevant. From this, he builds the groundwork of a philosophy in between rationalism and empiricism. Taking from rationalism an admiration and recognition of reason's power to direct action and combining it with empiricism's fascination with experience, Dewey creates a philosophy that puts the spotlight not on one or the other, but on both as leading to and taking from each other.

A decent if uneven collection of lectures by Dewey, spelling out his philosophy in the years subsequent to the First World War. Dewey is recognized today as one of the founding fathers of American Pragmatism, a philosophy that arose in the United States in reaction to the Hegelian and Idealist modes of philosophizing then current in Europe and in American academic circles. The pragmatists, claiming C. S. Peirce as their initial founding father and William James as their most eloquent spokesman, were ably represented by Dewey who even James seemed to defer to in his own works (Pragmatism, The Meaning of Truth). Dewey is best remembered today for his role in the philosophy of education but his basic thinking arose from his embrace of the pragmatic conception espoused by Peirce which makes truth and knowledge a function of what works for the knowing subject. This is sometimes oversimplified as the supposition that what works is true and what's true is what works but that's not a fair explanation of the pragmatic conception. As James points out in his book Pragmatism, true claims in this pragmatic sense are those which are seen to fit within larger conceptual/theoretical frameworks which prove themselves through application in the real world. It's not a one-to-one correspondence of claim to fact-in-the-world but a holistic correspondence which depends on the systemic effectiveness of our interlocking beliefs and claims, some of which touch ground in the real world but some of which may not or may never actually do so. Dewey's contribution to this is visible in the first lecture in this book in which he lays out his case for how human knowledge arises in a social context. He argues that knowledge is interactivity, activity of the organism in response to and proactively affecting its world.

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