

EDITED BY LARRY A. HICKMAN

# Reading Dewey



## Interpretations for a Postmodern Generation

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# Introduction

*Larry A. Hickman*

John Dewey (1859–1952), hailed during his lifetime as “America’s Philosopher,” is now generally recognized as one of the seminal thinkers of the twentieth century. His critical work ranged more broadly than that of either of his great contemporaries, Martin Heidegger and Ludwig Wittgenstein, and he anticipated by several decades some of their most trenchant insights. Dewey’s groundbreaking contributions to philosophy, psychology, and educational theory continue to animate research on the cutting edges of those fields.

The twelve original interpretive essays in this volume locate Dewey’s major works within their historical context and present a timely reevaluation of each of the major areas of his broad philosophical reach. They explore his contributions to logic, ethics, social and political philosophy, the philosophy of religion, the philosophy of art, metaphysics, and the philosophy of the human sciences. They also locate Dewey’s work as it relates to the dominant strands of modern philosophy, as it participates in the major debates of continental philosophy from phenomenology to post-structuralism, and as an early contribution to feminist thought.

This collection is thus designed to introduce Dewey’s basic insights and to provide a context for understanding the current revival of interest in his thought. The last previous comprehensive collection of original essays to do this was *Guide to the Works of John Dewey*, edited by Jo Ann Boydston and published in 1970. Although her collection still serves as a benchmark for Dewey studies, developments during the quarter-century since its publication have demonstrated the need for a reinterpretation of Dewey’s basic insights by, and for, a new generation.

## The Breadth of Dewey’s Philosophical Reach

Dewey disliked the idea of “systematic” philosophy and said so early in his career. Nevertheless, no major philosopher during his time or since has exhibited a broader philosophical reach. When he accepted a fac-

