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The Correspondence of John Dewey

Volume 1: 1873-1918


John Dewey

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The Center for Dewey Studies
Southern Illinois University at Carbondale

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Quick Guide to FolioVIEW

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Another Kind of E-Mail:
The Electronic Edition of
The Correspondence of
John Dewey

Martin Coleman


John Dewey was the most influential and arguably the most important American philosopher in the history of the nation. He was born in 1859 and died in 1952, a lifetime that spanned great social, political, and technological change: He saw the horse and the airplane, the Civil War and the atomic bomb, and the emergence of the United States as an economic and military superpower. Dewey’s most recent biographer, Jay Martin, points out that already by Dewey’s second decade rapid cultural change was occurring in America. The Civil War resulted in an increasing concentration of wealth among a small group, and greater industrial wealth led to growing urban populations. Along with these economic and social changes, education was becoming available to more people, science was gaining in cultural significance as a rival to religion, and the machine and new inventions were coming to hold a prominent place in American life. Martin writes that, in the face of these daunting changes, Dewey, the naïve schoolboy, somehow stumbled into the vocation for which he was destined, and he became “the person for his time, the one who learned to think about wealth and its consequences, the turmoil of the cities, the need for a new kind of education, the obligation to reform and reconstruct, and the importance of science and its practical application in method and thought” (Martin 2002, 30).
The practical application of science in method and thought entailed a reformulation of empiricism and a new conception of experience. For Dewey, the great lesson of science was the importance of taking experience seriously as method. Dewey rejected the dualism of thought and experience, as well as the attempt to reduce one to the other. In Dewey's view, experience is living, the interaction of creature and environment, and thought is a natural function of human life; it grows out of experience. This notion of experience enabled Dewey to conceive connections between opposed pairs resulting from the rapid shift from old to new, rural to urban, religious to scientific. His ability to see bridges over the gulfs opening up around him made Dewey a person for times of cultural change. Dewey worked to mend philosophical dualisms as well as social divisions, including those resulting in gender and racial inequality. He had a deep sense of the actual, the historic, and the accomplished, but he understood them as always being intimately bound up with possibilities for the future and for new growth.

The Electronic Edition

During Dewey's long life he traveled widely and took an active part in social and political affairs. He made significant scholarly contributions to philosophy, psychology, sociology, education, and the political life of America; and a record of his work can be found in the 37-volume critical edition of The Collected Works of John Dewey, edited by Jo Ann Boydston. This critical edition was completed, after almost thirty years' work, in 1990. In that same year the Center for Dewey Studies began work on the Dewey correspondence project. The goals for this project include publishing the correspondence of Dewey—now consisting of more than 21,000 letters, postcards, telegrams, and other documents—in electronic form, followed by a selected letterpress edition. So, the publication of the correspondence of one who observed and dealt with great cultural shifts is itself partaking of a technological shift occurring in the culture of documentary editing. The primary medium for the work available to both individuals and institutions will be electronic.

The Correspondence of John Dewey in electronic form consists of three volumes and is edited by Larry Hickman. It is a title in the PAST MASTERS series from InteLex Corporation, along with the electronic edition of The Collected Works of John Dewey, also edited by Hickman. The first volume of the Correspondence covers the years 1871 to 1918 and includes more than 3,500 documents. The second volume covers the years 1919 to 1939 and includes
over 5,000 documents. The first two volumes are currently available, and the third is due to be released this fall. It begins with documents from 1940 and concludes with the correspondence that followed Dewey’s death in 1952. The electronic edition of the Correspondence is available on CD-ROM and in a web server format for institutions. For both formats, InteLex includes its proprietary software called Folio VIEWS, which is required for reading and searching the texts.

Those who lament the replacement of the 12-inch vinyl record by the audio compact disc may also be dismayed on encountering the CD-ROM edition of volumes 1 and 2 of The Correspondence of John Dewey instead of a traditional letterpress edition. The decline of the vinyl record in favor of the CD has resulted in the shrinking of the characteristic features of a record to fit the smaller product. Cover art and inner sleeve goodies must fit behind the plastic tabs of the small, plastic jewel case. The smooth, silvery disc itself may strike one as sterile compared to the black vinyl with its treasures etched in the irregular grooves—recoverable with nothing more than a straight pin attached to a piece of light poster board formed into a conical amplifier and a pencil on which to spin the record.

The CD-ROM edition of the Correspondence comes in a jewel case that is packaged in a molded plastic case that resembles a book in size, shape, and manner of opening, all of which suggests its place on a traditional bookshelf. But the cover and spine of this package lack any marks identifying its contents beyond its manufacturer. The only feature of the entire product that indicates the contents of the disc is an inked-in square on the back of the CD jewel case next to one of 81 possible titles.

In contrast to the fate of the vinyl record, the characteristic features of a book are not reduced when adopting a digital medium; rather the electronic edition of the text discards the particular design features of a book altogether (while the packaging retains a weak semblance of the general features). The anticipatory moments of reading blurbs, assessing typefaces, thumbing through photos, feeling bindings and cover material, sniffing the pages—in short all of the experiences, each enjoyable on its own, that introduce one to a new book before actually submerging oneself in the printed text—are gone. And there is no way to crack the electronic text without the machine for

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1 The CD-ROM is available in two different versions: one for Windows operating systems and one for Macintosh operating systems. According to InteLex, the Macintosh version does not run native in OS X, but it will run in Classic mode or in OS 9. The CD-ROM used for this review contained the Windows version. It ran adequately in both Windows XP and Windows ME.
which it was designed.

Of course, the CD-ROM edition of the *Correspondence* may not elicit this kind of response from others. While most would agree that important differences can be attributed to different technologies, one may insist that the important differences in the case of the digital technology considered here are the increased efficiency, the increased speed and accuracy, and the better economics now possible in editing and publishing texts.

According to the User’s Guide for Folio VIEWS: “We need tools to help us consume information more effectively.” A CD-ROM edition may be considered just such a tool as it enables one to more easily and quickly consume the philosophical and historical significance of texts. Search capabilities quickly locate documents relevant to people or topics of special interest; cut and paste features reduce keystrokes during composition and allow text to be shared with colleagues by means of electronic mail; storage of texts becomes much easier with one 12-centimeter compact disc containing information equal to approximately 40 thick volumes of a letterpress edition for the entire collection of the Dewey correspondence.

Considering this increased efficiency in the distribution and consumption of information, one may come to see excessive lamentations over losses due to new technology as indicating a basic misunderstanding of the function of the text. Electronic texts rev up the capacities of texts to convey information; they present a new and better way to consume texts. The old aesthetic features were nice, but the new medium gets down to business by decreasing the time and cost of publishing and increasing ease and speed in the use of texts.

These two possible responses to the electronic edition of *The Correspondence of John Dewey* are easily seen, I hope, as extreme. The first stresses aesthetic quality and the second practical efficiency, almost to the complete neglect of the other. There is, of course, something true in both views. On the one hand, the packaging of the CD-ROM format does a poor job in its imitation of a book, but on the other hand it seems likely that most people will encounter the electronic edition of *The Correspondence of John Dewey* in the web server edition available to institutions. This suggests that the book really is not the model for the electronic text in its storage or its use. However, an emphasis on practical efficiency alone certainly would limit the possibilities of the electronic edition. Regarding the electronic edition as better because more efficient is as subject to a fixed ideal of how to “consume” a text as is the nostalgia for a text printed on paper.
The actual situation of the electronic text is different from what is conveyed in either extreme view because it can never be a case of complete loss of aesthetic quality or a complete gain of practical efficiency. John Dewey made a great effort throughout his long career to communicate this in terms of the richness of human experience. He insisted on taking experience seriously: that is, neither reducing it to one kind of experience, namely the experience of knowing, nor holding it apart as utterly irrational from the perspective of human reason. In this view, the aesthetic aspects of feeling and the instrumental function of thinking are continuous in the sense that each are phases of human interaction, not separate kinds of being. In more general terms, the ideal and the real, because both occur in human experience and as a result of human experience, are continuous; or as he expresses in a letter, “the possible is a trait of the actual, not something set over against it.”

This entails that aesthetic enjoyments are not set over against the instrumental or practical aspects of experience—both traits of experience are present and together are potentially enriching. The separation of these aspects of experience results in the stilted responses given above and neglects the possibilities present in actual experience.

Readers can trust that Dewey’s insight informs the sensibilities that produced this edition of his letters. Larry Hickman, director of the Center for Dewey Studies and general editor of The Correspondence of John Dewey, understands Dewey to claim that “the end of human living is not practice ... or contemplation ... or even enjoyment. It is, rather a cycle of production: production of new significances, production of new feelings, production of new means of enjoying, production of new techniques of production. To be human is to be involved in production, to advance what nature has given, to construct ourselves, to be technological” (Hickman 1990, 76). This technological understanding of human living denies the dichotomy between the static ideal of the purely aesthetic and the perpetual motion of mechanical activity. The new technologies of the electronic text of the Correspondence neither displace the aesthetic nor champion the narrowly practical. In Dewey’s view, technology is richer than either of these alternatives. According to Dewey, “Technology signifies all the intelligent techniques by which the

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2 2191.11.08 (02946): John Dewey to Elsie Ripley Clapp. References to documents in The Correspondence of John Dewey are made by giving the date of the document followed by the number of the document in parentheses and the names of the writer and addressee.
energies of nature and man are directed and used in satisfaction of human needs; it cannot be limited to a few outer and comparatively mechanical forms" (LW.5.270).

In his essay "Literacy, Mediacy, and Technological Determinism," Hickman argues from this understanding of human living and technology to a rejection of the idea that different kinds of texts—say, electronic and letterpress editions—are distinguished by fixed essences. Recognizing the continuity of the aesthetic and instrumental in experience entails the rejection of the view that some kinds of texts are essentially or absolutely better than other kinds.

Human living involves taking up the means of production or tools to remake present conditions and enrich further experience. While the living is constituted in part by the kinds of tools taken up, these materials do not wholly determine the character of the experience. It is the role of intelligence to determine how a tool will enrich experience. In the present case, the tools are texts, and it is not predetermined that a particular type of text adds beauty and another adds efficiency in consumption. Recognizing the variety of experience, that is, the always-present possibilities in actual experience that excludes neither the practical nor the aesthetic, entails an understanding of tools that rejects a fixed conception of their nature: One kind of text is not essentially aesthetic and another essentially practical. Therefore, no essential contest must be settled between the two types of texts. One text is not better than another any more than a screwdriver is better than a hammer. That is, they serve different functions, resolve different problems, and are not fundamentally distinct in the sense of being wholly aesthetic or wholly practical.

This means that the electronic edition of The Correspondence of John Dewey is to be considered as neither an affront to booklovers nor a device of factory scholarship but rather, in the spirit of its principal subject, as a tool "for enjoyment and use" (Hickman 2001, 120). Because it has no essential form that excludes "meaningful inquiry into what [it] can be" (Hickman 2001, 120), taking experience seriously means inquiring into what experiences can be had with this text. So this review now takes the form of a consideration of

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what kind of tool is the electronic edition of *The Correspondence of John Dewey*,
how it may be enjoyed and used, and what it may potentially become.

The Documents

The documents included in *The Correspondence of John Dewey* give life to
the events and ideas of Dewey’s life in a way unparalleled by the best biog­
raphies, although they lack the narrative structure and coherence of the lat­
ter. The actual process of intellectual growth is revealed with its probings and
false starts and outside influences. The letters show in a way that publications
cannot that the method is the thing, that is, that knowing is an activity. Family
life is made vivid, both the growth of loving relationships and the heart­
breaking deaths of Dewey’s children Morris and Gordon. Gordon’s illness,
his recoveries, and his parents’ hope as detailed in letters are especially dis­
turbing to read, knowing the sad outcome. Long friendships and professional
relationships display a character possible to discern because the reader has
the benefit of years of correspondence gathered together for examination.

The collection is not limited to correspondence to and from John Dewey:
there are also third-party letters about Dewey and other documents, such as
a record of Dewey’s undergraduate transcript from the University of
Vermont and government memoranda and FBI reports that refer to Dewey.
The government documents concern Dewey’s assessments of political activity in China and later his relationship to groups with ties to Soviet Russia.
Letters to and from important people in Dewey’s life before they entered his
life are included here, such as correspondence between Harriet Alice
Chipman, Dewey’s first wife, and her family and friends, and letters between
Roberta Lowitz Grant Dewey, Dewey’s second wife, and her first husband
Roy Grant. The volumes also contain letters written about Dewey by his
teachers, colleagues, peers, and critics. These include letters of recommen­
dation,\(^4\) letters written about Dewey’s work,\(^5\) and letters containing more

\(^4\) 1882.02.11 (00417): H. A. P. Torrey to George Sylvester Morris; 1883.04.03 (00426):
Matthew H. Buckham to Daniel C. Gilman; 1883.04.05 (00427): H. A. P. Torrey to Daniel

\(^5\) 1887.01.12? (09529): William James to Thomas Davidson; 1887.01.30 (09206): William
James to G. Stanley Hall; 1896.07.23 (09530): William James to Alice Howe Gibbens.
James; 1933.04.15 (11711): George Santayana to Sidney Hook; 1922.06.14 (17041): Oliver
Wendell Holmes Jr., to Harold J. Laski; 1931.05.15 (17032): Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr., to
Frederick Pollock.

\(^6\) 1914.03.22 (08296), 1914.03.26 (08297), and 1921.02.21 (08295): Bertrand Russell to
Ottoline Morrell; 1937.02.08 (08626): Franklin Roosevelt to Charles R. Crane.
personal assessments of Dewey. While the selection of these third-party letters and documents seems obvious in some cases (letters of recommendation, for example), the criteria for choosing others is puzzling. For example, the only quotation from a Santayana letter is interesting, but as I show later in this review, there are other letters written by Santayana that are more revealing of his view of Dewey and perhaps more insightful about Dewey’s thought.

The Apparatus

The scholarly apparatus in the Correspondence includes brief instructions on searching the collection and the proper syntax for searching dates. (A complete User’s Manual is also included with the software, and it gives more detailed instruction on using the software.) The sections “Principles of Transcription” and “Dewey’s Alterations” describe the conventions used in giving the documents the appearance they have in the Correspondence. Spelling, capitalization, and paragraphing are left untouched; but brackets are used where necessary to supply missing letters or words, make editorial conjectures or clarification, or indicate the appearance of the original in case a document is damaged, writing is illegible, or some portion overwritten. Documents are transcribed with the author’s deletions in red type on a gray field and carets indicating interlineations and substitutions (see figure 1 on page 100). These conventions are both informative and convenient for the reader.

The section entitled “Source List” provides details, including contact information for archives where documents in the Correspondence are kept. “Document Abbreviations” explains abbreviations used in describing the nature of documents. “Identifications” is a helpful collection of capsule information on people and organizations mentioned in the Correspondence. This section gathers together information contained in footnotes throughout the Correspondence. There is also an impressive chronology of Dewey’s life that includes references to letters in the Correspondence, The Collected Works of John Dewey, and secondary sources like newspapers and university publications announcing events involving Dewey. It is a working chronology and readers are encouraged to contact the Dewey Center with additions and corrections. The “Chronology” also provides something of a preview of what is in the

7“You Deweyfy Marx a good deal: wouldn’t it be better to Marxify Dewey? In respect to the material basis of all life Marx and even Engels (though he hedges a little in the last letter, which you quote at the very end) seem to me much clearer and more honest than Dewey, Kallen, & Co—” 1933.04.15 (11711): George Santayana to Sidney Hook.
third volume of the *Correspondence*, because it includes references to letters collected there.

The “Preface” details the gathering, transcription, and organization of the documents included in the *Correspondence*. Also discussed are copyright issues, previous editions of Dewey’s letters, and material new to this second edition of volume 1 of the *Correspondence*.

The research tool that most directly illuminates the content of the collection is the introduction that begins each volume. Each volume’s introduction surveys the documents contained in that volume. Hickman writes the introduction to the first volume, and Michael Eldridge, author of *Transforming Experience: John Dewey’s Cultural Instrumentalism* (Nashville, 1998), writes the introduction to the second volume. It is made explicit at the outset that these introductions are neither biographies nor chronologies. The introductions serve to guide the reader through the massive amount of material presented in the *Correspondence*, and in this they do an exquisite job. Hickman compares each volume’s introduction to a map or a series of signposts. Perhaps “life preservers” is a better metaphor than “signposts,” given the vast sea of documents facing the reader wading in for the first time. The number and variety of correspondents is impressive, and they not only show Dewey’s openness to all sorts of people, but they also allow the present-day reader to see Dewey’s ideas expressed in contexts beyond those of professional philosophy.

In the introductory surveys major events and important correspondents are noted with extensive quotations from relevant documents. The contents of the first volume include correspondence and documents that give insight into the character of Dewey’s parents; Dewey’s education and early professional life; the development of Dewey’s philosophical ideas; his relationships with his wife and children; his time at the University of Chicago, where he shaped the department that William James proclaimed a genuine school of philosophy; and his less-than-pleasant departure from Chicago for Columbia University.

Important correspondence that Dewey maintained for years begins in the period covered by the first volume. Correspondents in this volume include Elsie Ripley Clapp, a student and graduate assistant of Dewey’s; Horace Kallen, a graduate of Harvard who taught philosophy at the University of

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Wisconsin and became a professor at the New School for Social Research; Scudder Klyce, a writer of philosophy books decidedly outside the academic realm; Albert C. Barnes, a philanthropist and art collector who attended some of Dewey’s lectures and aided his study of art that contributed to his important work, Art as Experience; Max Otto, a friendly and helpful critic of Dewey and a professor of philosophy at the University of Wisconsin; and Salmon O. Levinson, a longtime family friend and lawyer who worked with Dewey in the outlawry of war movement.

Eldridge’s introduction to the second volume guides the reader through correspondence about Dewey’s years in Japan and China; his travels to Turkey, Mexico, and Russia; the death of his wife Alice; his involvement with the Trotsky Commission in Mexico City; his second wife, Roberta Lowitz Grant Dewey; and through many letters to family and friends about everyday life.

Letters in the second volume provide insights into the reception of his major works. Art as Experience, Dewey’s book on art and aesthetic experience, is identified as the first book written by Dewey that his children read.9 He also answers inquiries that provide insights into the thinking that went into Experience and Nature,10 often regarded as the greatest single statement of his views, and A Common Faith,11 his little book about religious experience. Especially relevant to Dewey’s philosophical work is ongoing correspondence with Max Otto and Dewey’s former students Sydney Hook and Joseph Ratner. Both of the students became good friends with Dewey and worked closely with him: Hook published books about Dewey and his philosophy, and Ratner published anthologies of Dewey’s work. Correspondence with both helped Dewey work out his philosophical ideas.

In the second volume, serial correspondence continues with Barnes, Klyce, Otto, and Levinson, and also includes correspondence with Corinne Chisholm Frost, a teacher who came across Dewey’s name at a lecture, read Experience and Nature, wrote to Dewey, and, to her surprise, received an answer with encouragement to write again. In the second volume begins correspondence with Arthur F. Bentley, a former college lecturer and journalist, and author of books on sociology, economics, linguistics, and philosophy, with whom Dewey would write The Knowing and the Known in 1946.

9 1934.04.20 (04346): John Dewey to Albert C. Barnes.
The introductory surveys give the reader a strong sense of the collection and indicate places to begin inquiring into the letters according to topics of interest. Letters discussed in the introductions are adequately cited, but a chief advantage of an electronic edition is neglected here: It seems that more extensive use could have been made of hyperlinks. It would have been helpful to be able to click on the reference to a letter in order to read the complete document for oneself.

**The Dewey-Clapp Correspondence**

Following a particular signpost (or reaching for a particular life preserver) in Hickman’s introduction led me to the Dewey-Clapp correspondence of the fall of 1908. Dewey taught a course that semester and summarized the lecture and discussion of each meeting to include in his letters to Clapp. Dewey’s letters, the only half of the correspondence included here, indicate that Clapp was commenting and making suggestions that Dewey found helpful.

Hickman writes, “Dewey’s letters to Clapp provide insights into his teaching methods and reveal the extent to which he is actually thinking, as opposed to just lecturing, in his classroom” (Hickman 2001, “Introduction”). The notion that Dewey thought through a problem rather than lectured about it is a common refrain in the reminiscences of former students about Dewey as a teacher (Martin 2002, 260–61), and many add descriptions of how Dewey took the students along with him. One called it an “active deference” to student questions that drew out intellectual wonders in the classroom. These accounts seem to relate concrete experiences of the cultivated naïveté that Dewey describes in *Experience and Nature* as the result of “the discipline of severe thought” (LW.1.40) and that he claims to struggle to cultivate himself in a letter to Leo Stein: “I’m trying to be naive, which is of course impossible, and I don’t know whether I can live long enough to be so without trying.” In this way, the letters illustrate how Dewey lived an aspect of the philosophy he published.

The wonderful thing about reading the Clapp letters for oneself is the sense of accompanying Dewey on a classroom inquiry. The present-day reader has the luxury of knowing how much of the inquiry turns out: One simply has to read the subsequent published works. But reading the letters still provides a sense of excitement in seeing how it was done: the circling of the problem, the various formulations that did not make it into a book, the

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12 1926.02.22 (04963): John Dewey to Leo Stein.
times when Dewey simply does not know how to proceed. One gets a sense of Dewey’s effort; he struggled with problems that took years for him to even articulate clearly.

In a letter to Clapp summarizing a discussion of knowledge, Dewey wrote about the place of desire or passion in the activity of knowing. Taking desire as both urgency and incompleteness, he was unable to articulate its relationship to knowing. “This involves a peculiar combination, so peculiar that I find myself unable to express it, of requiring knowing—reflective—and excluding, working against it.” Dewey then cited William James as giving a good account of the facts: Passion or desire shuts out reflection but yet some element of reflection remains in the very passion that rejects reflection. This is so because passion, in shutting out reflection, senses the consequences of reflection. That is, passion shuts down reflection because it knows that reflection is deleterious to passion. Dewey wrote, “This expresses perhaps the peculiarity of the combination referred to.”

The nature of the combination remained a pressing question for Dewey. In 1916 he wrote the long introduction to Essays in Experimental Logic, a reissue of his essays included in the 1903 Studies in Logical Theory plus some newer essays. The essays are focused on the cognitive aspect of experience, but Dewey was concerned to emphasize that the cognitive does not exhaust the character of experience. As already discussed, Dewey maintained that experience was neither exclusively rational nor exclusively irrational. In stressing that experience is much broader than the specialized activity of knowing, he wrote that “this is not to deny that some element of reflection or inference may be required in any situation to which the term ‘experience’ is applicable in any way which contrasts with, say, the ‘experience’ of an oyster or a growing bean vine” (MW.10.321). Here again is the peculiar combination remarked on in the earlier letter.

In 1922, Dewey took up the question of the peculiar combination again in his book Human Nature and Conduct. In this book, Dewey worked out a theory of habit and impulse that gave greater depth to his discussion of the nature of knowing, and he now characterized knowing as an interaction of established habit and vital impulse. The peculiar combination had become “a certain delicate combination of habit and impulse” (MW.14.124). According to Dewey, without impulse to animate it, habit is impotent; and without habit to direct it, impulse is equally ineffectual. But one misses the

13 1911.11.21 (02950): John Dewey to Elsie Ripley Clapp.
point if one simply takes Dewey to have restated in terms of habit and impulse Kant's familiar dictum that thoughts without content are empty; intuitions without concepts are blind. Dewey described how experience itself comes to be intelligent, how reflection results from the interaction of habit and impulse; this is not the work of *a priori* categories imposing order on reality but an emergent quality of life continuous with and as natural as (though with a different experiential quality than) the heliotropism of plants or the instinctual behavior of animals.

The key ingredient in intelligence is neither habit or impulse nor even the mere presence of both: it is the ongoing interaction of both. This combination is, Dewey wrote to Clapp, "not something life has, but what it is."¹⁴ In 1922 Dewey expressed in *Human Nature and Conduct* what had seemed to stump him 14 years earlier and in a terminology that is familiar but also capable of demolishing the dilemma of conceptual scheme and empirical content that was bequeathed by Kant, has bedeviled empiricism, and still exercises thinkers today.

The letters give a broader context for these ideas that appear in the published works and in doing so reveal other connections or other formulations. The articulation of the relation of passion and reflection in terms of impulse and habit in *Human Nature and Conduct* yielded the idea that the intelligent cultivation of intelligence requires widening, not narrowing, one's "life of strong impulses while aiming at their happy coincidence in operation" (MW.14.137). The idea is that wider and deeper interaction produces stronger and more varied impulses that keep habits from growing rigid and stupid. In a letter to Clapp, Dewey already expresses the spirit of this advice in a neat formulation that owes its inspiration directly to Clapp. Dewey wrote to Clapp, "You are right too about thinking as trusting instinct .... we trust convention—the deposit of some past idea—not instinct in thinking; and we trust impulse instead of reason—reasons—in action."¹⁶ Unreasonableness is manifested in both impulsive action and conventional thought; conventions are habits grown rigid, and unreasonable impulse lacks the guidance of intelligent—that is, flexible and responsive—habits. Dewey described genuine

¹⁴1911.09.02 (02938): John Dewey to Elsie Ripley Clapp.
¹⁵See the comment on this work in 1922.06.14 (17041): Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr., to Harold J. Laski, in which Holmes described the book as "not feeling to me quite as new as it is civilized. I seem to have known the fundamentals before." It is consistent with the kind of praise Holmes would give Dewey's work. It gives the impression, one sometimes encouraged by Holmes himself, that he did not quite grasp what Dewey was doing.
¹⁶1911.10.16 (02943): John Dewey to Elsie Ripley Clapp.
thinking as the exercise of impulse in imagination for the purpose of creating new solutions to problems. This is the only way to avoid impulsive action when presented with obstacles.

The letters lay bare not only Dewey’s intellectual struggles but also their communal character. And it was not only Clapp who contributed to Dewey’s thinking. Throughout the correspondence one sees Dewey’s openness to others’ ideas and his graciousness in acknowledging this, and his summaries of classroom discussion are no different. Dewey writes of the contribution students made in discussion and how this opened his eyes to some difficulty. In the introduction to the Correspondence, Hickman cites a good example in which Dewey wrote that a question posed by a student “gave me more pause than anything that has come up, and I am still very unclear on the matter.”

A great benefit of reading these letters in the electronic edition is that by searching on the field for the addressee (in this case, Clapp) one can, at the click of a mouse button, read the letters sequentially without scrolling through other unrelated letters: One can follow uninterruptedly the thread of a continuous correspondence.

**Dewey and Santayana**

The example of the Dewey-Clapp correspondence does not, of course, exhaust the ways to use the Correspondence. I also made a wider search for letters concerned with George Santayana, a contemporary of Dewey’s who was born only four years later and was a student of William James and Josiah Royce at Harvard University. I performed the search on the name “Santayana” in the fields of “writer” and “addressee”, and also in the text of the letters. The identified documents were telling about the relationship of the two thinkers as well as the temperaments of both.

Dewey and Santayana were not close personally, and similarities in philosophical outlook, some of which were sometimes significant, were more often overshadowed by their differences. But there were undeniable connections: Santayana’s teacher James was an important influence on Dewey; Dewey and Santayana had friends and, in some sense of the word, followers in common; and they were aware of each other’s work. Dewey reviewed eight books by Santayana, including a novel and two collections of essays, and he also reviewed one collection of critical essays about Santayana. Santayana reviewed two books by Dewey, and submitted one of the reviews

17 1911.09.02 (02938): John Dewey to Elsie Ripley Clapp.

The best-known philosophical exchange between Dewey and Santayana took the form of two published articles. Santayana’s contribution was a review of Dewey’s 1925 book *Experience and Nature*, entitled “Dewey’s Naturalistic Metaphysics” (L.W.3.367–84) that was republished in 1940 in a collection of critical essays by various writers entitled *The Philosophy of John Dewey*, the inaugural volume in the Library of Living Philosophers series. In this essay, Santayana characterized Dewey’s metaphysics as having an interest in human experience, which he termed the foreground, that excluded the background of nonhuman nature, that of the infinite universe to which human direction and particularity are relative. According to Santayana, this exclusionary interest undercut Dewey’s right to be called a naturalist without qualification. Santayana thought Dewey’s naturalism was half-hearted at best. Dewey then wrote a response entitled “Half-Hearted Naturalism” (L.W.3.73–84) in which he characterized Santayana’s naturalism as “broken-backed” for excluding much human experience from nature. These two articles comprise the published record of the direct conflict between the different outlooks of Dewey and Santayana. It is a conflict that has been characterized more as a difference in emphasis than as an outright disagreement, and the letters suggest this is a fair assessment while also giving it much greater depth.

Until recently, many if not most scholars believed that Dewey and Santayana never met and that, with the exception of reviews and mentions in books, they never corresponded. For example, Herbert Schneider, a colleague of Dewey’s at Columbia University, made the claim that Dewey and Santayana never met in a letter to Richard Rubin, who wrote his doctoral dissertation on Santayana and Dewey. Schneider would seem to be a reliable source, since he took his B.A. from Columbia in 1915 and his Ph.D. in 1917, later worked as Dewey’s teaching assistant, and remained at Columbia for the rest of his career. But the letters show that Dewey and Santayana

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almost certainly met in person, and that they did have a private philosophical exchange.

The letters strongly suggest that Dewey and Santayana met in 1910, which is presumably just prior to Schneider's arrival at Columbia. In 1909 Dewey and Nicholas Butler, the president of Columbia University, exchanged letters arranging a series of six lectures by Santayana. Santayana gave the lectures in February 1910 based on a course he had taught at Harvard and which were published later that year by Harvard University Press as *Three Philosophical Poets: Lucretius, Dante, and Goethe*.

Nothing in the letters indicate that Dewey was away from Columbia in February, and it seems almost certain that Dewey could have attended these lectures and interacted to some extent with Santayana.

Requiring no speculation is the claim that Dewey and Santayana corresponded in 1911. There is a letter written by Dewey to Santayana in which Dewey expressed his interest in and appreciation for Santayana's journal articles (making it seem even more likely that he attended Santayana's Columbia lectures of the previous year). He then asked in a rather detailed way for some clarification of points concerning Santayana's views. One point that concerned Dewey was a trademark view of Santayana, namely that empirical philosophy is inherently solipsistic. Dewey is interested in this because he considered his own outlook empirical though not in the traditional philosophical sense following Locke. With reference to empirical philosophy, Dewey wrote, “I think its meaning to your mind and to mine is an other illustration of how easy it is in philosophy to suppose that two persons are discussing the same subject, when they are talking, as a matter of fact, in different universes of discourse.”

Santayana apparently responded to this letter almost immediately because there is another letter from Dewey dated four days after his first letter thanking Santayana for his response. It is not clear what form Santayana's response took, and if it was written, it has not been located. However he

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20 In addition to the Dewey-Butler letters, there are also letters between Dewey and a university secretary arranging Santayana's payment 1910.02.25 (02345): Frederick P. Keppel to John Dewey; 1910.03.22 (02358): John Dewey to Frederick P. Keppel; 1910.03.24 (02359): Frederick P. Keppel to John Dewey.

21 1911.03.09 (03608): John Dewey to George Santayana.
made his response, he posed questions to Dewey that Dewey evaded. Dewey wrote: “I am not going to try to answer any of the questions you raise, because, while very simple and direct, they do not spring up readily in the sort of question that more habitually preoccupies me, and I want to assimilate them.”

Interestingly, part of this Dewey-Santayana exchange was echoed six weeks later in a letter written by Santayana to a friend in which it is again suggested that Santayana may have met with Dewey. Santayana wrote: “I was in New York for a week at Easter, and saw some old friends, and also the philosophers at Columbia, but without making much progress in mutual understanding. As Dewey said, we are all facing different problems when we seem to be discussing the same point.”

These letters of 1911 are the only indication of direct correspondence between Santayana and Dewey, with the exception of their published exchange. Each thinker continued to mention the other occasionally in letters to friends. Santayana acknowledged a favorable review by Dewey in 1917. In 1921, Santayana wrote: “I have never studied Dewey myself at all attentively or completely, and I am not sure that I understand him, but I suspect that he is merely attempting to analyse the vision of the human mind, the ‘experience’ (in the proper sense of the word) that a typical American has nowadays of the world.” He found the attempt to be shallow and perhaps naïve—“so very American” though he did detect a “noble sincerity” in Dewey’s efforts.

When Santayana began reading for the review of Dewey’s *Experience and Nature* in March 1925 he called the book “a heavy tome” and “a ponder-

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221911.03.13 (03609): John Dewey to George Santayana.
23Santayana, Letters 2:35. *The Letters of George Santayana* is Volume V of *The Works of George Santayana*. Volume V consists of eight books, six of which have been published to date. References to The Letters are given by the number of the book followed by the page numbers. For example, “Santayana, Letters 2:35” refers to the second book of *The Letters of George Santayana*.

In a recent e-mail message, Rubin agreed with the suggestion made here that Schneider was incorrect in his letter stating that Dewey and Santayana never met. Early in 2002, Rubin visited the Center for Dewey Studies at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, and Larry Hickman showed him the letters from Dewey to Santayana, which were located for Hickman by Harriet Simon, an editor of *The Correspondence of John Dewey*. Within a few days Rubin contacted Kris Frost, Assistant Director of the Santayana Edition at Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis, who passed along the 1911 letter from Santayana that mentioned his Easter visit to New York.

24Santayana, Letters 2:298.

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ous tome” by one who “wishes to rear truth on the sands of industrialism. I am going to call him the ‘Latest Oracle of the Zeitgeist,’ and I have a feeling that these are swan-songs because industrialism may be short-lived.”

Santayana suggested that writing the review had become something of a burden to him. He sent a draft of the review to F. J. E. Woodbridge, a colleague of Dewey’s at Columbia, and in the accompanying letter he wrote, “I little thought that my article on Dewey’s book would have taken six months to write.” In the same letter he wrote, “I hope [the review] may amuse Dewey and not offend him, because I have come away from reading his book—twice, most attentively—liking him better than ever.”

The seeming change of tone may reflect an awareness of the relationships of the recipient, but elsewhere he almost defended Dewey when an author named Warner Fite attacked Dewey in print. In a letter to Fite sent late in 1925 Santayana wrote, “my eye has fallen on your strictures on poor Dewey, with whom I have been lately wrestling on my own account. I think you are hard on him; he is doing such a difficult pioneer’s work in reducing the human intellect—sadly idle and good-for-nothing so far—to a working instrument, all muscle and no fat. The poor creature never did such a terrible penance in his life before, but I think it will do him good.” Of course, the irony is thick but it seems good-natured and perhaps explains Santayana’s somewhat wounded response to Dewey’s article “Half-Hearted Naturalism” that answered Santayana’s review.

The fact that Dewey answered the review at all indicates the strong feelings it evoked, and this seems to have taken Santayana aback. But the letters suggest that Santayana had the stronger reaction to the whole affair. In 1927 in a letter to his friend Charles Augustus Strong, he characterized Dewey’s article as an “explosion.” He wrote, “I am sorry that Dewey should have been so much enraged by my article: I meant to be friendly and sympathetic....” He then attributed misunderstandings between Dewey and himself to “Dewey’s extraordinary intellectual deafness and blindness.” He wrote, Dewey “can’t think: he can only see things move: and for that reason he wonders how I, who sometimes see things moving too, can also think about them and see the dialectical and eternal relations of their essences.”

Setting out to write a sympathetic review landed Santayana in a cranky mood.

32 Santayana, Letters 3:266.
33 Santayana, Letters 3:327.
34 Santayana, Letters 3:327.
35 Santayana, Letters 3:327.
That the exchange was unpleasant for Santayana is made explicit in a letter from the end of 1927 to Herbert Schneider, who had apparently asked Santayana to review a book by Woodbridge: “No: I can’t write a review of Woodbridge’s *Realm of Mind*; it would require re-reading and a terrible struggle to become clear as to what it means. My experience with Dewey was enough: no more such reviews in this short life.”

In reading the two articles by Santayana and Dewey it is not immediately clear that one exceeds the other in critical tone. But a comparison of letters does reveal a difference in tone. The exchange appears not to have affected Dewey in the way that it did Santayana. In 1926 Dewey wrote to Max Otto that Santayana’s review “was very interesting, but I could not for the most part get any feeling of contact.” Looking throughout the letters one cannot find a letter from Dewey to match the rhetoric of Santayana’s letter on Dewey’s intellectual incapacities. Even after Santayana’s review one sees Dewey praising Santayana’s literary style, albeit to a follower of Santayana’s, Gertrude Stein’s brother Leo.

In other letters Santayana is criticized but without any ill-tempered accompaniment. Santayana’s importance in aesthetic theory is tacitly acknowledged by his currency in the correspondence of Dewey and Barnes, the art collector. Letters as well as Dewey’s publications indicate that Santayana’s aesthetics was taken seriously. A critical comment came from Barnes, who classed Santayana’s aesthetics with that of Aristotle as having “too much philosophy and too little natural reaction to experience, and a too limited experience.” In a 1931 letter to Joseph Ratner, Dewey criticized Santayana’s psychological theory for being sensationalistic, the result of Santayana’s being “obsessed with the older psychology.” And in a 1935 letter, Ratner criticized Santayana’s poetizing as a form of escape and unsuitable for philosophy.

The point of this comparison is not to hold up one or the other, Santayana or Dewey, for either praise or blame in their conduct of the philo-

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37 1926.05.27 (05080): John Dewey to Max Otto.
38 1926.02.22 (04963): John Dewey to Leo Stein.
39 1920.11.02 (04111): Albert C. Barnes to John Dewey; 1921.01.07 (04117): Albert C. Barnes to John Dewey.
40 1930.10.16 (04298): Albert C. Barnes to John Dewey.
41 1931.03.20 (07397): John Dewey to Joseph Ratner.
42 1935.06.11,12,13 (06902): Joseph Ratner to John Dewey.
43 The harshest words on Santayana in the Dewey correspondence came from Scudder Klyce, who wrote: “such talkative asses as Santayana don’t amount to much” (1924.03.19 (04664): Scudder Klyce to John Dewey). But Klyce cannot really be taken as representative of anything but Scudder Klyce.
sophical dispute. The point is to show how the letters give depth and support to the assessment that their differences are ones of emphasis, and that this in turn indicates differences in temperament. The letters show just how those differences play out: For Santayana the dispute showed that Dewey neglected or lacked capacities of mind; the dispute occurred because Dewey saw only motion and had no appreciation for thought. For Dewey the dispute appears to have been a matter of course, or at least something that was over with the published response; things kept moving along. In a sense there seems to be little room for disagreement here: Santayana might have said Dewey does not stop and contemplate; and Dewey might have said exactly, because I am thinking. The difference lies in the values held regarding the life of the mind.

The Software

Because each volume of the Correspondence contains such a large number of documents, understanding how the Folio VIEWS software works is important for making the best use of the collection. The program is not terribly difficult to use, but it does take some time to learn how to navigate the collection effectively. The ways of moving around among the documents are simply scrolling through the text, jumping through the collection by means of links from the Table of Contents, and searching by means of the Query dialogue box. Scrolling is not very precise when moving through a large amount of text. The Table of Contents is helpful when moving to titled sections of a volume and in conjunction with the search capabilities. There are two main kinds of searches, text searches and field searches, both of which are executed using the Query dialogue box.44 The dialogue box features automatic completion of search terms (see figure 2 on page 114). It also displays a list of words that may complete the user’s entered text. This is helpful because it can show instantly that a search term is not present anywhere in the collection, or it can sometimes suggest variant spellings of a search term.

Each document may be searched for a particular word or phrase. Standard operators such as “and,” “or,” “not,” and “exclusive or” are supported, and may be used by typing in either the English expression or a symbol. So one could enter the search criteria “James ^ William” or “James not

44The Folio VIEWS software also permits documents to be searched by group and level, but these classifications do not appear to be that helpful given the way the Correspondence is structured.
William” and all documents returned will contain the name “James” and lack the name “William”. It is possible to do both ordered and unordered proximity searches; for example, one can search for letters that contain the words “Chicago” and “pragmatism” within five words of each other. Wildcards may be used as part of a word or phrase. These may be used to search for patterns or variant spellings of words. When searching for phrases, the entire string should be enclosed in quotation marks. There are also special operators that permit searching for word forms and synonyms: Using the word form search operator with the word “run” will return occurrences of “runs,” “running,” “ran,” as well as “run.” Unfortunately, this feature does not appear to work with names, so using the word form operator with “Santayana” does not return “Santayana’s” or abbreviations or misspellings. The synonym operator will return documents with occurrences of a word and its synonyms. Searching on the word “love” returns documents with the words “love,” “delight,” “affection,” and so on. The symbols for performing these functions appear to be confused in the user’s manual.

Documents also may be searched by fields. Each document is tagged with ten fields (see figure 3 on page 114): first, a number is assigned to each document; second, the writer of the document is identified; third, the addressee is identified; fourth, the place from which the document originated is given; fifth, a cue consisting of the first few words of the document or of the body of the letter is given; sixth, the source is given, for example, “CLSU,” which is identified in the “Source List” as Special Collections, University Library, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA 90089-0182; seventh, the collection is named, for example, “Harris Papers”; eighth, the kind of document is indicated, for example, “ALS”, which is explained in the “Document Abbreviations” as an “autograph letter signed”; ninth, the number of pages is noted; and tenth, notes about the document are given, such as notations on the document, the presence or absence of enclosures, issues of authenticity, or identification of persons. Given appropriate syntax, the standard query dialogue box may be used to search fields; and there is also a dedicated fields query dialogue box (see figure 4 on page 116).

These search capabilities can be augmented in different ways. Often repeated searches can be saved in a search link; one may search on ranges of dates, for example, and theoretically one may combine and nest field searches. However, it is not actually possible to combine field searches. This could be a problem, because it leaves one scrolling through results looking for a document that could have been located precisely using a combined
search. For example, one should be able to search for letters written by Dewey to Salmon O. Levinson in 1934. The query would look like this:

[field addressee:levinson] & [field date:1934*]

When attempted, this search returns no hits (see figure 5 on page 116). But two such documents do exist: 1934.01.17 (03416): John Dewey to Salmon O. Levinson, and 1934.01.25 (03506): John Dewey to Salmon O. Levinson. Without the ability to do a combined search one ends up with either 142 hits on Levinson as addressee or 224 hits on letters dated 1934. The work-around in this case is fairly simple: Search on Levinson as addressee; then, when the hits are marked in the text, use the Contents button in the tool bar to go to the Table of Contents; double-click on the plus sign in front of “The Correspondence of John Dewey” and each year will be listed below, with the number of search hits in bold in front of the year (see figure 6 on page 118); double-click on “1934” and proceed through the marked hits using the Next button on the tool bar. (Alternatively one could double-click on the plus sign in front of 1934 for a listing of all the letters of that year. The letters to Levinson will be indicated by a “1” in bold in front of the date and number of the letter.)

Another problem one may encounter is the influence on search results of typographical errors and misspellings in the original document. For example, George Santayana’s last name is misspelled at least three different ways in the Correspondence. It occurs as “Santyana,” “Santayan,” and “Antayana.” When searching on the name “Santayana” all of these misspellings will be missed, and so perfectly relevant documents may be missed in the search. (This also is true for occurrences of names with an apostrophe “s”, but this is easy enough to correct for manually.) Furthermore, Dewey sometimes abbreviated Santayana’s name with “S.”, but Dewey also sometimes used “S.” to stand for “student”.

There are two partial solutions to this problem. First, one could pay close attention to the list of possible matches displayed in the Query dialogue box as one types in the search term. These possible matches are presented for the purpose of using the automatic completion feature. Of course, if the misspelling varies too widely it will not show up in the displayed list of possible matches. Second, one could employ wild cards. But if one is unaware of all the possible misspellings in the collection, wildcards will not be helpful. They will catch too much or too little. Neither one of these proposed solutions would necessarily allow one to find “Antayana.”

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| Figure 6 | Documentary Editing 26(2) Summer 2004 |

| Table 1: Documentary Editing, Summer 2004 |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>John Doe</td>
<td>The Complete History</td>
<td>1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane Smith</td>
<td>The Early Years</td>
<td>1996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary Johnson</td>
<td>The Latest Update</td>
<td>2002</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This is a table showing the projects and their titles along with the corresponding years.
Perhaps the ideal solution to this problem would have to be implemented in the transcription of the documents. The “Principles of Transcription” allow for misspelled words deemed important enough to be correctly spelled in brackets. Abbreviations, such as “S.” for “Santayana” could be spelled out as well. In this way, no violence would be done to the original document and searches could be more fruitfully pursued. While this would require no more editorial judgment than is exercised in creating a good index, it would require an effort equivalent to indexing 40 books of correspondence. Hence, in the end, the inconvenience of misspelled words eluding search criteria seems a small price to pay for easy access to this extensive and readable collection of documents.

Sometimes, navigating the collection most effectively requires combining the search capabilities and the links in the Table of Contents. For example, if one wanted to locate the entry for Corinne Chisholm Frost in the “Identifications” section, one would first search on the name “Frost, Corinne Chisholm,” which would return 55 hits. Then, one would click on the Contents button and click on the links that take one to the “Identifications” section, thus bypassing the first 54 hits on the search term. From there, one would click on the button that takes the screen to the nearest hit, and one would end up at the entry for Frost, Corinne Chisholm in the “Identifications” section.

One of my first reactions on browsing the Correspondence was a desire for more extensive use of hyperlinks. Within the documents there are links from footnote references to the footnotes at the end of the particular document, and there are also very helpful links from particular documents to photographs included in the Correspondence. For example, at the beginning of the document collection of volume 1, there are links to photographs of Dewey’s mother and of the Dewey children and a cousin. It would have been nice if the same feature could have been used with references to particular letters and documents in the introductions, the footnotes, and the chronology. Each time a document is cited, the citation could be hyperlinked to the document. But, once again, it should be emphasized that this is a very large collection of documents, and including more hyperlinks during the editorial process may be an unreasonable expectation. The software does come with customizing features, including the ability to create hyperlinks as needed.
Conclusion

The electronic edition of The Correspondence of John Dewey is an outstanding achievement in the gathering, preparing, and organizing of an extremely large number of documents. Because there is little likelihood that so many documents could be published in a letterpress edition, the electronic version makes available to researchers a tremendous amount of material that would otherwise be stored in files or on microfilm in a library or research center.

The main issue surrounding the electronic format of The Correspondence of John Dewey is not a loss in aesthetics or a gain in efficiency; rather it is the creation of new possibilities of communication and growth in scholarship. It is fitting that material so helpful in understanding a thinker sensitive to the beneficial possibilities presented by change should be presented in a format that not only represents important changes in media technology, but itself allows for rapid changes in organization and communication of material. The electronic edition of The Correspondence of John Dewey is a text that embodies inspiration and possibility.45

Bibliography


45 I am grateful to Richard Rubin for the discussion of his correspondence with Herbert Schneider and for helpful suggestions about this review. I would also like to thank Larry Hickman for answering technical questions about the Folio VIEWS software.