

November 12, 1952

Mrs. J. R. Fisher  
Arlington, Vermont

Dear Mrs. Fisher,

I have kept this too long already and must apologize for the delay.

I enjoyed it very much. The side of Dewey that you talk about is illuminating to me and, so far as I can tell from my knowledge of him, absolutely sound. It was a pleasure to have the privilege of reading it. I should, however, like you to know my feelings on two points which you make. They are not boners or mistakes of interpretation that can be demonstrated but I feel they are important enough so that you should at least consider the kind of reaction which I had. The first is that you twice mention as the reason that the Russians are against Dewey is opposition to the dogma of violence. This may be a part of the reason, of course, but in my opinion they hated him because of the very active part he took in what you might call practical education against Communism. Dewey was not only a writer but a most incredibly active joiner of committees and sponsor of this or that petition or movement and I would say that this activity of his rather than his non-violent philosophy was what they feared most about him. The second point is the one you make on page 18. An observation like Dr. Kandel's makes me a little angry. It's so professionally philosophical. There used to be a time when a philosopher's influence was measured by the impact he made on the thinking of his society rather than the impact he made on other philosophers, but I guess that day is over. On the old score, of course, Dewey is one of the most influential philosophers that has ever lived and the fact that he has caused teachers and doctors and engineers to look at the world in a new way is far more important than whether he has caused Ph.D.'s and professors to revise their systems. It is just as legitimate to use Dr. Kandel's statement as a devastating criticism of academic philosophy today.

I say the above mostly because I feel that what you have to say about John Dewey is so worthwhile that no one can possibly complain if you do not say anything about him as a professional philosopher. I feel it is entirely needless for you to get into that wrangle. I fear that the above may not be too helpful and I wish I had time to do more justice to your piece. I am, however, grateful to you for the warmth and pleasure which I felt when I read it.

Yours sincerely,

Frederick Burkhardt