

**JOHN DEWEY'S PHILOSOPHY OF CREATIVE INTELLIGENCE**

by

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Although John Dewey is often cited as the most influential philosopher America has produced, his contributions to modern thought have yet to be fully appreciated. Despite the fact that he is frequently identified as an American philosopher par excellence, he was international in his outlook and concerns. It is therefore especially appropriate that a discussion of Dewey be included in a volume devoted to exploring the global significance of philosophy and religion. The purpose of this article is twofold. First, since both philosophical and religious thinkers are being discussed, to present an exposition and criticism of Dewey's philosophy of religion. Second, so that his philosophy of religion may be more fully understood and adequately appraised, to provide a preliminary exposition of some of the major themes of his philosophy.

Dewey was born in 1859, the year in which Darwin's The Origin of Species appeared. The central assumption on which the following exposition of Dewey rests is that his philosophy is best understood if it is seen as an attempt to work out a Post-Darwinian conception of human beings and their place in nature. It was Dewey's contention that however else we think of human beings, we should never forget that they are first of all organisms interacting with an environment.

All organic beings, Dewey pointed out, exhibit patterns or tendencies to behave in certain ways. Some of these tendencies are innate in the sense that they are predispositions to respond in a particular way whenever a certain type of stimulus is present. The usual name for such tendencies is instinct. Since instincts cause organisms to respond to certain stimuli while ignoring others, they are a form of selective behavior. Appeal to

instinct, however, is not sufficient to explain organic behavior. Even in the case of lower organisms we must take note of the manner in which instincts are modified in specific situations. Thus Dewey believed that even though all organic behavior is a product of instinct, until "we know the specific environing conditions under which selection took place we really know nothing".<sup>1</sup>

Nor can all organic tendencies be reduced to a single or small number of instincts for the purpose of economy of explanation. "An infantile logic, now happily expelled from physical science, taught that opium put men to sleep because of its dormitive potency. We follow the same logic in social matters when we believe that war exists because of bellicose instincts; or that a particular economic regime is necessary because of acquisitive and competitive impulses which must find expression. Pugnacity and fear are no more native than are pity and sympathy."<sup>2</sup> It is true, of course, that all animals "including man,...perform many acts whose consequence is to protect and preserve life".<sup>3</sup> But it is fallacious to conclude from this that all organic behavior is due to an instinct for self-preservation.

A similar fallacy is involved in "transforming the...fact of acting as a self into the fiction of acting always for self".<sup>4</sup> Whenever an act is brought to completion, the desire to do that thing may be said to have been satisfied. But not all satisfactions are identical. "Each satisfaction is qualitatively what it is because of the disposition fulfilled in the object attained....But theory...blankets the tremendous diversity in the quality of satisfactions...by pointing out that they are all satisfactions...Because a Nero and a Peabody both get satisfaction in

acting as they do it is inferred that the satisfaction...is the same in quality, and that both were actuated by...the same objective."<sup>5</sup> In fact, the more one examines human actions the more one is aware of diversity of motives.

The case for explaining human behavior by appeal to a limited number of drives is not aided by transforming them into abstract social forces. "Native racial spirit, the spirit of the people or of the time, national destiny are familiar figures in this social zoo. As names for effects, for existing customs, they are sometimes useful. As names for explanatory forces they work havoc with intelligence."<sup>6</sup>

Any account of human behavior that fails to take account of the social is nevertheless grossly deficient. For while organic impulses or instincts provide the motivating forces for human action, the form which actions take is a function of culture. For example, although the drives for food and sex are natural impulses, the channeling of these impulses into specific patterns of behavior is a result of social conditioning. Unlike many other animals, human beings are completely helpless at birth. In order to survive they must both undergo a period of physical development and learn certain skills from others. Since they are dependent on others, one of the most important skills they must learn is the ability to enter into cooperative endeavors. Even though unlearned impulses play a crucial role in the development of human behavior, the infant's impulses are "merely starting points for assimilation of the knowledge and skill of the more matured beings upon whom he depends."<sup>7</sup>

Instinctive behavior is biologically prior, but explanation of

particular human actions requires specification of the meaning such actions have for individuals within a culture. In learning a language an individual simultaneously acquires the ways of thinking and values of a culture. This provides a framework within which things are judged good or bad, right or wrong, worthy or unworthy of being sought.

The process of learning is during the early years more a matter of the development of habits than of the deliberate pursuit of objectives. Since habits are learned modes of interaction with an environment, they necessarily involve the development of skills. Thus, Dewey defines habit as an ability or art formed through past experience.<sup>8</sup> This is true of all habits, including the ability to walk or swim, to chip stone or make bows and arrows, or driving an automobile while thinking of other things. Habit is often contrasted with thought; but effective thought, like any other skill, is dependent on the development of certain habits.<sup>9</sup> Nor are the habitual and the pursuit of higher values necessarily opposed. The virtuosity of the most accomplished violinist would be impossible without the existence of habits. The development of a virtuous or good moral character is also the result of the formation of the proper habits.<sup>10</sup>

Both instincts and habits involve predispositions to act in certain ways. They differ primarily in the fact that habits involve past learning while instincts are natural, unlearned, tendencies to behave in given ways. Because humans are social beings, instinctive behavior in their case is quickly overlaid by the development of habits. However, to the degree that habits function in an automatic and unconscious way, they are similar to instincts. Neither instinctive nor habitual behavior, both of which may be

explained by preceding states of affairs, directly involve intelligence. To be intelligent an action must be guided by anticipation of future consequences. This is not to say that instinct and habit cannot serve rational ends. To the contrary, they are presupposed in every art and science. There is also an important respect in which it does not matter to society why individuals do certain things so long as they do. Custom and tradition are necessary ingredients of every society from the most primitive to the most advanced. But progress in the development of civilization depends on innovation which is impossible without intelligent behavior.

Human beings are capable of acting intelligently, Dewey argued, only because they have sense organs which allow them to perceive objects at a distance. They are therefore able to respond to some things or events as signs of others. Black clouds or a clap of thunder are taken as an indication that rain is likely, and shelter is sought before it begins. The development of language comes about through the substitution of conventional signs such as the word 'thunder' for thunder which is a natural sign of rain.<sup>11</sup>

Intelligent action, Dewey maintained, tends to occur only when natural instincts and settled habits are disrupted. So long as things are going smoothly thought is dormant. It is only when problems arise in obtaining goals that thought is elicited. However, the human situation is never static. This is partially due to the fact that nature changes and develops, and partially because human beings themselves are constantly transforming their environment. To the extent that instinct and habit free

the mind to concentrate on the novel and the unique in the environment, they further intelligent action; but if they lead one to respond in the old accustomed way even though the environment has changed, they impede intelligent action.

Intelligent action presupposes knowledge. It requires that one examine alternative courses of action and select the one most likely to result in the goal sought. The test of knowledge for Dewey is successful adaptation. A belief or theory is true, that is, to the degree that it allows one to predict and control the environment. Successful adaptation, as here conceived, is not a passive affair, but involves modifying and adapting the environment to one's goals and purposes.

Dewey's development of the concepts of intelligence and knowing as successful adaptation are a notable advance over previous philosophical theories. Empiricists had interpreted humans as passive spectators of nature. They conceived of the mind as a tabula rasa and of knowledge as resulting from "impressions" made on this inert substance. They believed that to verify a belief it was necessary to trace the ideas involved back to an origin in sensation. However, because sensations were thought of as occurring within the subject, and it was believed that all one could know were one's own ideas, empiricism generated skepticism regarding the existence of an external world. Rationalists, on the other hand, held that human beings were endowed with an innate faculty of Reason which provides insight into a preexisting, transcendent, realm of being and value. They found the test of truth in self-evidence. When confronted with disagreement they, therefore, fell back on subjective certainty, bringing

about the accusation of dogmatism.

Kant attempted to avoid both skepticism and dogmatism by distinguishing the content of knowledge, supplied by sensation, from the form or organization of knowledge, contributed by Reason. But because he claimed that the categories of the Understanding were constitutive of nature, and at the same time affirmed the existence of a transcendent realm of things in themselves about which we can know nothing, the historical outcome of his thought was to create an even greater, more exaggerated, division of thinkers into radical subjectivists or dogmatic absolutists. Furthermore, even though Kant thought of Reason as an active faculty of the human mind, his over-all conception of human beings treats them as passive in nature. Indeed, according to Kant, human beings considered as a part of nature are completely determined. They can be considered to be free only insofar as they simultaneously participate in a transcendent kingdom of ends. Since Kant offered no theory as to how this was possible, the result of his philosophy was to make free will a totally mysterious affair and to perpetuate a dualism of mind and matter as sharp as the one Descartes had maintained.

In starting with human beings conceived in a Post-Darwinian manner as organisms interacting with their environment, Dewey by-passed such traditional problems as whether there is an external world. The existence of a natural order within which humans function is assumed from the outset. Subjectivists who believe that knowledge is the result of impressions made from without are in fact assuming the existence of such a realm also. Dewey points out that they are, therefore, inconsistent in maintaining that



sensation is an inner, private, affair. Experience is the result of interaction between the organism and its environment and is thus always experience of something. Even when we daydream or have hallucinations, the content of our experiences is drawn from our previous interactions with the world. The categories of human understanding are not constitutive of nature as Kant believed, but are merely ways by which we adapt ourselves to and modify a pre-existing order. However, this pre-existing order is not alien to thought. There is no problem in explaining how mind can know nature because "the organs, instrumentalities and operations of knowing are inside nature, not outside."<sup>12</sup> Thought "is not a property of something termed intellect or reason apart from nature. It is a mode of directed overt action. Ideas are anticipatory plans and designs which take effect in concrete reconstruction of antecedent conditions of existence. They are not innate properties of mind corresponding to ultimate prior traits of Being, nor...a priori categories imposed on sense in a wholesale once-for-all way, prior to experience so as to make it possible."<sup>13</sup> Knowledge for Dewey then is not a matter of a priori categories working behind the scene to process sensations. It is a mode of action requiring such things as the formulation and verification of hypotheses, experiment, successful prediction and control of the environment. Symbolic systems such as mathematics and logic are not in the strict sense knowledge, but are only instruments by which knowledge is obtained. Any division between knowing and doing, such as Kant's division between theoretical and practical reason, is artificial because knowing is itself a type of doing.

In replacing the faculty of Reason, which was not dependent on bodily

existence, but could characterize such abstractions as Cartesian Egos, with the idea of intelligent action, Dewey also by-passed such traditional issues as the mind-body problem and how inner freedom and external necessity can be reconciled. The problem of how mind and body are related, Dewey argued, arises only if they are conceived from the outset as two different substances. If the term 'mind' is taken as describing certain types of organic behavior, then mind must necessarily be conceived as embodied. The reason, that is, that we say that human beings have minds but stones do not, is because the former are capable of intelligent action while the latter are not. This presupposes, of course, that organisms with minds are conscious of their environments whereas stones are not, but this in no way implies that consciousness could exist apart from an environment of which it was aware. Consciousness is something that arises within nature, not outside of it.

Human beings also do not have some special faculty of free will which sets them apart from nature as not subject to causality. All organic beings exhibit selective behavior. The more successful an organism is in modifying and controlling its environment, the freer it is. Since the extent to which an individual is capable of doing this is a function of intelligence, it is the most important factor in the degree of freedom enjoyed. Intelligent action requires both certain capacities on the part of individuals and favorable environmental circumstances. However, unless an unwarranted mind-body dualism is introduced, there is no reason for dividing freedom into "inner" and "outer" freedom. Freedom is merely effective action in obtaining one's goals.

The most important factor in the development of the capacity for free action is education. Education is the means by which previously achieved knowledge and skills are passed on to individuals. These include not only intellectual but social skills. A central part of a child's education is learning how to act cooperatively to obtain mutual benefits. Individual human experience is cumulative. Earlier experiences are a factor in shaping later experiences. Habits are built which both condition subsequent responses and mold the personality of the individual.

Not only individuals undergo change as a result of experience. Because experience involves interaction between individuals and their environment, the environment is also changed by human experience. As a result of the ability of humans to pass knowledge and skills on to their young, and the power of experience to transform the environment, experience is socially as well as individually cumulative. "We live from birth to death in a world of persons and things which in large measure is what it is because of what has been done and transmitted from previous human activities."<sup>14</sup> There is therefore no possibility of the individual disassociating herself or himself from custom and tradition. Without them the individual would not respond to the environment as a human being, but would interact at a more primitive, animal, level. To adopt the view that convention and institutions are in themselves enemies of freedom, Dewey believed, "is to deny the only means by which positive freedom...can be secured."<sup>15</sup>

Custom and tradition are as necessary as personal habits in the development of freedom and individuality. Indeed, custom and freedom might be said to be social habits. As noted above, if habit causes one to act in

old accustomed ways even though the environment has changed, it impedes rather than furthers intelligent action. Intelligent practice can never rest content with what has been achieved, but must always use past achievements as resources to shape the future. If society is to promote the maximum growth and development of individuals, this is as true of social practices as of individual ones. Institutions must undergo constant evaluation and modification.

Since educational institutions play a crucial role in the development, transmission and maintenance of social practices, their evaluation and reform was one of Dewey's major concerns. He especially attacked educational institutions which make learning a matter of memorization, encourage passivity instead of active curiosity, limit the teacher's role to passing on previous knowledge rather than teaching and employing methods by which additional knowledge may be obtained, and bring about social conformity rather than developing attitudes and abilities needed to further democratic social practices. The primary objective of education, in Dewey's opinion, should be to help the learner become a rational, socially concerned, individual. This requires both sympathetic understanding of the individual and a structuring of the environment to bring about the proper experiences. It also requires equal attention to subject matter and methods. No matter how important the knowledge and skills to be transmitted, the attempt will fail unless a way can be found to make them interesting and relevant to the individual's present needs. This does not mean that education should be concerned exclusively with present needs. To the contrary, the goal of education must be to select from the past the

information and skills required for individuals to shape the future in an intelligent way so as to produce the good society.

Since education involves the transmission of knowledge and skills found useful in the past, selected for their relevance to the future, it necessarily includes the study of history. However, the heart of the educational process, in Dewey's opinion, must be the study and practice of the sciences, for it is in the sciences that he finds the problem-solving techniques of intelligence developed in their highest forms. This does not mean that such subjects as art and literature should be neglected. Dewey believed that art teaches us as much about nature and human beings as science.<sup>16</sup> Unlike some recent writers who believe that art and science have given rise to separate cultures, Dewey did not see them as standing in opposition to one another. Because of the limitations of space a single quotation will have to carry the weight of illustrating Dewey's view of the relationships between art and science, a doctrine which is central to his philosophy of art.

The difference between the esthetic and the intellectual is...where emphasis falls in the constant rhythm that marks the interaction of the live creature with his surroundings. The ultimate matter of both...is the same....The odd notion that an artist does not think and a scientific inquirer does nothing else is the result of converting a difference of tempo and emphasis into a difference in kind. The thinker has his esthetic moment when his ideas cease to be mere ideas and become the corporate meaning of objects.

The artist has his problems and thinks as he works. But his thought is more immediately embodied in the object. Because of the comparative remoteness of his end, the scientific worker operates with symbols, words and mathematical signs. The artist does his thinking in the very qualitative media he works in....<sup>17</sup>

Dewey did not mean to imply that scientific thought takes place solely within the realm of the symbolic. The fact that the test of scientific theories is their application is taken for granted in the above quotation. What Dewey is stressing is that if art is thought of primarily as a creative activity, and not merely as a matter of passive enjoyment, then art like science involves both thinking and transforming the environment. Any sharp distinction between the two is unwarranted. Every science involves art and every art involves science.

It is only by means of intelligence expressed through the arts and sciences that humans have gained control of their environment to bring about civilization. If nature were totally unsuited to support human life this obviously would never have occurred. But because nature is undergoing constant changes, our control of it can never be complete. There is no way to eliminate the unknown and hazardous from human life. Early humans especially lived in an uncertain world. Both science and religion, Dewey argued, are responses to the uncertainty of human life.

Science is the attempt to control the environment through intelligence. Religion is the attempt of humans to assure themselves that changes will eventuate in beneficial results. Religion has taken two basic forms. One

expression of religion is to be found in "supplication, sacrifice, ceremonial rite and magical cult."<sup>18</sup> These are methods by which humans have attempted to ingratiate themselves with the powers of the universe, to win their support for human endeavors. The other form religion has taken is the attempt to remold human attitudes so that whatever occurs is viewed as either not harmful or for the best. Stoicism and early Buddhism are examples of the first attitude, the Christian belief in providence an example of the latter.

Since sacrifice and magic are not grounded in observation, experiment and control of causal factors responsible for change, they are unreliable methods of dealing with human uncertainty and suffering. Changes of belief and attitude are equally ineffective unless they are accompanied by intelligent action. Unfortunately philosophy as well as religion has engaged in a futile search for certainty which has ignored the role of intelligent action in human life. "Philosophers have celebrated the method of change in personal ideas, and religious teachers that of change in the affections of the heart."<sup>19</sup> The arts and sciences which have "effected actual objective transformation have been regarded as inferior, if not base, and the activities connected with them as menial."<sup>20</sup> Both religion and philosophy, Dewey argued, have attempted to prove, in one way or another, that the ideal is the real. This has led to various dualisms which have plagued human thought such as being versus becoming, the supernatural versus the natural, the mental versus the physical, etc., all of which are attempts to deny the existence of change and suffering by correlating one side of the dualism with the actual and good and the other

side with illusion and evil.

Dewey believed that the problem of evil makes it impossible for thoughtful people to believe in the existence of an omniscient, omnipotent, totally benevolent, supernatural deity. Not even the most ingenious apologetics, he stated, have really faced, much less answered, this problem.<sup>21</sup> The existence of such a deity, in his opinion, is also beyond the scope of any possible knowledge which must be limited to what we can know by the methods of the sciences.

Given these beliefs, and his attack on religion as a misguided search for certainty, one might expect Dewey to have abandoned religion as having no legitimacy whatever. Instead, he argued for a "purification" of religion, by a separation of what he called the religious from religion. In doing this he believed that he was positioning himself between two extremes. On the one hand was supernaturalism which he thought had been discredited by science; on the other skepticism which holds that "with elimination of the supernatural not only must historic religions be dismissed, but with them everything of a religious nature."<sup>22</sup>

Supernaturalism has been discredited, Dewey argued, not so much by the content of the sciences as by acceptance of scientific method as the only legitimate mode of knowledge. "The mind of man is being habituated to a new method and ideal: There is but one sure road of access to truth - the road of patient, cooperative inquiry operating by means of observation, experiment, record and controlled reflection."<sup>23</sup> Religious liberals have not realized what is at stake as much as fundamentalists. Liberals have adopted a policy of retrenchment, abandoning religious doctrines which seem



to be inconsistent with the findings of science, claiming that they were not essential to the religious outlook in the first place. Fundamentalists, on the other hand, have responded by denying that science provides the only legitimate mode of knowing, appealing to revelation as a higher form of knowledge. Whenever scientific and religious beliefs conflict, they have rejected the scientific rather than the religious. But this is an irrational response to the problem. One cannot simply go on affirming old beliefs about heaven and earth after Copernicus, Newton, Darwin and Einstein, whose basic ideas have not only been confirmed by experience but have changed the nature of the world in which we live.

Fundamentalism is an absurd attempt to preserve a system of beliefs intact, regardless of the findings of experience. Liberalism, on the other hand, in accepting science as the test of religious belief, runs the risk that all religious beliefs will have to be abandoned. If one is to avoid this, then at some point the policy of retrenchment must be abandoned and it be insisted upon that certain beliefs are essential to a religious outlook.

Not surprisingly a third view has come to prominence in recent times. This is the position that religion is based on a unique type of experience that provides direct knowledge of God. The appeal to religious experience as the ground of religion is, of course, not new. But Dewey believed that the challenge of science to religion had given special impetus for such an appeal.

[T]here are many religionists who are now dissatisfied with the older "proofs" of the existence of God...Moreover,

these religionists are moved by the rise of experimental method....What is more natural...than that they should affirm they are just as good empiricists as anybody else - indeed, as good as the scientists themselves? As the latter rely upon certain kinds of experience to prove the existence of certain kinds of objects, so the religionists rely upon a certain kind of experience to prove the existence of the object of religion, especially the supreme object, God.<sup>24</sup>

Since Dewey also appealed to religious experience in establishing his own position he was especially anxious to differentiate his view of religious experience from the foregoing. Dewey believed that a survey of religion from the remote past to the present shows that the differences in beliefs and practices of what have been called religions are so great that:

We are forced to acknowledge that...there is no such thing as religion in the singular. There is only a multitude of religions. "Religion" is a strictly collective term and the collection it stands for is not even...the kind illustrated in textbooks of logic. It has not the unity of a regiment or assembly but that of any miscellaneous aggregate.<sup>25</sup>

However, if we focus our attention on general attitudes rather than specific beliefs and practices, then Dewey held that it was possible to isolate some common features of all religions. All religions, e.g., provide an orientation of individuals toward themselves, others, and the universe. Furthermore, insofar as such orientations are acquired, rather

than the result of passive acculturation, they bring about radical transformations of personality. Unlike some superficial changes of behavior, acquiring a religion involves deep-seated and inclusive changes in the ways people believe and interpret their experiences. Because such transformations are so radical they are frequently interpreted as the result of some outside force or agency. But in Dewey's opinion such a change is, in a broad sense of the term, voluntary. "In calling it voluntary, it is not meant that it depends upon a particular resolve or volition. It is a change of will conceived as the organic plenitude of our being, rather than any special change in will."<sup>26</sup> Acquiring a religious orientation involves an imaginative reconstruction of one's conception of one's self, of others, and of the universe. Imagination is involved because "the idea of a whole, whether of the whole personal being or of the world, is an imaginative, not a literal, idea."<sup>27</sup>

Since imaginative reconstruction is essential to religion, religion and poetry are similar. The only difference, according to Dewey, is that religion involves a more fundamental, deep-seated, transformation of outlook. However, the distinction is not a sharp one because if a poetic experience were to bring about a radical change of outlook, it would have to be classified as a religious experience also. This is because Dewey equates religious experience with experiences which radically transform outlooks and attitudes.

It is the claim of religions that they effect this generic and enduring change in attitude. I should like to turn the statement around and say that whenever this change takes

place there is a definitely religious attitude. It is not a religion that brings it about, but when it occurs, from whatever cause...there is a religious outlook and function.<sup>28</sup>

The cause of an experience is for Dewey relatively unimportant in determining its religious quality. "The...religious quality in the experience is the effect produced, the better adjustment in life and its conditions, not the manner and cause of its production."<sup>29</sup> Such a reorientation of life may take place in many ways. "It is sometimes brought about by devotion to a cause; sometimes by a passage of poetry...; sometimes as was the case with Spinoza - deemed an atheist in his day - through philosophical reflection."<sup>30</sup>

Religious experience as Dewey conceived it is also not centered on a unique object. To interpret mystical experience as an experience of God, as in the third position above, Dewey believed, was an unwarranted imposition of the categories of a particular culture. "Having been brought up in the Christian religion, its subject interprets it in...terms of the personal God characteristic of that religion. Taoists, Buddhists, Moslems, persons of no religion including those who reject all supernatural influence and power, have had experiences similar in their effect."<sup>31</sup> "The particular interpretation given...is not inherent in the experience itself. It is derived from the culture with which a person has been imbued."<sup>32</sup>

The reorientation of life produced by religious experience usually involves an ethical component. It provides ideas which guide people in

their conduct toward others. This does not imply, Dewey argued, "that all moral faith in ideal ends is by virtue of that fact religious in quality. The religious is 'morality touched by emotion' only when the ends of moral conviction arouse emotions that are not only intense but are actuated and supported by ends so inclusive that they unify the self."<sup>33</sup> The religious pursuit of an ethical ideal, therefore, differs from moral action as usually understood in two respects: (1) It is motivated by a "comprehensive attitude...much broader than anything indicated by 'moral' in its usual sense."<sup>34</sup> (2) It involves a deep-seated commitment to a particular way of life. Since these features qualify the way an ethical ideal is sought, rather than the nature of the ideal, Dewey concludes that "any activity pursued in behalf of an ideal end against obstacles and in spite of threats of personal loss because of conviction of its general and enduring value is religious in quality."<sup>35</sup>

The concept of faith within the Judeo-Christian tradition, Dewey maintained, has been "inextricably tied up with intellectual beliefs about the supernatural."<sup>36</sup> It has involved belief in an unseen power which controls human destiny. Given Dewey's interpretation of religious experience this "unseen power controlling our destiny becomes the power of an ideal."<sup>37</sup> Understood this way faith does not "depend for its moving power upon intellectual assurance or belief that the things worked for must surely prevail."<sup>38</sup> There is no agency which guarantees that our projects will succeed or that history will eventuate in a certain way. Nevertheless it is possible for us to hope that the ideals of religious aspiration can be achieved. This is true because, despite the supernaturalism of the

tradition, the ideals of religious aspiration have always in fact been derived from "values...actually realized upon a natural basis - the goods of human association, of art and knowledge. The idealizing imagination seizes upon the most precious things found in the climacteric moments of experience and projects them."<sup>39</sup>

It is true that nature is in many respects indifferent or even hostile to our endeavors. But aspirations such as the hope of attaining a just society are not "mere rootless ideals, fantasies, utopias. For there are forces in nature and society that generate and support the ideals."<sup>40</sup> Supernaturalists are correct in believing that "human destiny is...interwoven with forces beyond human control".<sup>41</sup> But these are natural forces, not supernatural agencies. Nor should human beings be thought of as completely at the mercy of natural forces, because it is nature which has given birth to human intelligence that allows us to partially control our destiny. Human life should not be thought of as radically divorced from nature nor nature as totally devoid of intelligence.

Both supernaturalism and humanistic atheism, Dewey argued, lack natural piety.

For in spite of supernaturalism's reference to something beyond nature, it conceives of this earth as the moral center of the universe and of man as the apex of the whole scheme of things. It regards the drama of sin and redemption...as the one thing of ultimate importance. Apart from man, nature is held either accursed or negligible. Militant atheism is also affected by a lack of

natural piety. The ties binding man to nature that poets have always celebrated are passed over lightly. The attitude taken is often that of man living in an indifferent and hostile world and issuing blasts of defiance.<sup>42</sup>

For Dewey "the essentially unreligious attitude is that which attributes human achievement and purpose to man in isolation from the world of physical nature and his fellows."<sup>43</sup> A religious attitude, on the other hand, involves "the sense of a connection of man, in the way of both dependence and support, with the enveloping world that the imagination feels is a universe."<sup>44</sup>

Dewey may be said to have reduced faith in God to faith in intelligence. However, this statement standing alone is misleading because faith as Dewey understood it also involves a feeling of dependency on, and an attitude of piety toward, nature which has given rise to intelligence. It involves trust that "the natural interactions between man and his environment will breed more intelligence and generate more knowledge provided the scientific methods that define intelligence in operation are pushed further into the mysteries of the world, being themselves promoted and improved in the operation."<sup>45</sup> To properly understand Dewey a statement such as "There is such a thing as faith in intelligence becoming religious in quality"<sup>46</sup> must be set along side those such as "Our successes are dependent on the cooperation of nature"<sup>47</sup> and

The community of causes and consequences in which we,  
together with those not born, are enmeshed is the widest

and deepest symbol of the mysterious totality of being the imagination calls the universe. It is the embodiment for sense and thought of that encompassing scope of existence the intellect cannot grasp. It is the matrix within which our ideal aspirations are born and bred.<sup>48</sup>

It was this combination of natural matrix and the human aspirations to which it gives rise that Dewey thought most deserved to be called divine. This was what he meant when he stated that it was the "active relation between ideal and actual to which I would give the name 'God'."<sup>49</sup>

Because faith in God conceived this way included trust in the on-going support of nature for intelligent activity, Dewey believed that it, like traditional faith in a supernatural God, could "protect man from a sense of isolation and...consequent despair or defiance."<sup>50</sup> But, in his opinion, this way of conceiving faith and God, also has a number of other advantages over traditional belief. It does not involve one in the problem of evil. It avoids conflict between scientific knowledge and religious doctrine. In fact, it gives our "aspiration for...knowledge a...religious character, since growth in understanding nature is...organically related to the formation of ideal ends."<sup>51</sup> It eliminates the dualism between the religious and the secular. Since "the method of intelligence is open and public,"<sup>52</sup> it does not involve appeal to unverifiable private experience.

Another advantage of conceiving religious aspirations this way, Dewey argued, is that it separates them from "beliefs and...institutional practices that are irrelevant to them."<sup>53</sup> Dewey thought this important because "many persons are so repelled from...religion by its intellectual



and moral implications, that they are not even aware of attitudes in themselves that if they came to fruition would be genuinely religious."<sup>54</sup> Conceiving faith and God this way, he maintained, would also free religion from apologetics which consumes a great deal of the time of religious thinkers, thereby sapping the religious life of its energy. This energy could then be spent in the pursuit of ethical ideals such as bringing about a just society. Still another benefit, he maintained, would be to free people from the debilitating belief that the fulfillment of religious ideals is assured by an external agency and requires no action on our part. Supernaturalism, he argued, has in fact, often retarded the fulfillment of religious ideals by sanctioning the status quo and deprecating human intelligence which is required to achieve them.

Dewey believed that because faith as he understood it did not require belief in the supernatural, acceptance of the doctrines of a particular group, or commitment to any specific institutional practices, it was capable of becoming the common faith of all human beings. However, this is doubtful. Even if Dewey were correct in holding that belief in a transcendent deity is an illusion, the question arises as to whether, given human inability to tolerate uncertainty, belief in such a deity will ever die. Thus Freud who agreed with Dewey that belief in a transcendent deity is an illusion, nevertheless held that such belief was likely to continue. Dewey thought that belief in a transcendent deity would wither away as a result of the sciences making the world a more secure place. This view ignores the extent to which science and technology contribute to the uncertainty of life. This is perhaps more obvious to us in the atomic age

than it was to Dewey in 1932, but it has in fact been true in every historical period. Dewey also believed that wide-spread acceptance of scientific method would lead to the gradual erosion of fundamentalism. However, he seems to have underestimated the degree to which people are capable of cognitive dissonance, i.e., of adhering to contradictory beliefs rather than facing unpleasant facts. He also seems to have underestimated the need of people for institutional support in arriving at religious beliefs or pursuing a way of life. Quite apart from the truth or falsity of either Dewey's or traditional beliefs, there are, therefore, good reasons for doubting that Dewey's conception of religious faith is likely to ever become a common faith.

Dewey's claim that his conception of faith represents a "purification" of traditional faith is also questionable. It is more likely to appear to most people to be an abandonment of traditional faith. Dewey can in fact be better described as setting a rival conception of faith over against traditional conceptions than as distilling the "religious" from previous religions. Dewey's equation of religious experience with experiences which bring about radical and enduring changes in orientation toward life is also problematic. If religious experience can be identified with the intense pursuit of a cause, as Dewey at several places suggests, there would seem to be no way to distinguish it from political fanaticism. It is perhaps in part to avoid this consequence that Dewey also spends of religious faith as involving an ethical component and natural piety. However, neither of these are included in his definition of religious experience. He also writes as though religious faith always brings about both a sense of self-

unity and of unity with one's fellow human beings. This in my opinion is not true of all historical faiths. Nor do I see any reason it must be true of religious faith as Dewey defined it. Intense emotional experiences which radically transform a person's orientation toward life can as easily lead to disunity of self and alienation from others as to self-unity and a sense of oneness with others.

Dewey admits that his faith that continued interaction with nature will lead to ever increasing intelligence in human life rests on a selective reading of the facts. He also stresses our ultimate dependence on, and the mystery of, nature. What he does not seem to appreciate fully is the extent to which these doctrines are in tension with one another. The fact that humans have been successful in the past in mastering their environment and taking charge of their destiny has given them increasing confidence that they can do so in the future. Our age is characterized by the hope of genetic engineering far more than by appreciation of the mystery of the universe. Dewey was correct, in my opinion, in speaking of religious attitudes as involving a sense of dependence on a unseen force or forces, and irreligious attitudes as embodying pride in human achievements taken in isolation from such forces. This notion of an unseen force can be interpreted in many ways. However, one interprets it, our age seems to me to be one characterized by irreligious hubris.

NOTES

1. John Dewey, Human Nature and Conduct (New York: Modern Library, 1930), p. 91.
2. Ibid., pp. 110-11.
3. Ibid., p. 135.
4. Ibid., p. 136.
5. Ibid., pp. 136-7.
6. Ibid., pp. 111-12.
7. Ibid., p. 94.
8. Ibid., p. 66.
9. Ibid., p. 69.
10. Ibid., p. 38 ff.
11. See, e.g. Dewey, Experience and Nature (New York: Dover, 1958), Chapter Five and Dewey, Theory of Valuation (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), p. 6 ff.
12. John Dewey, The Quest for Certainty (New York: Capricorn Books, 1960), pp. 210-11.
13. Ibid., pp. 166-7.
14. John Dewey, Education and Experience (London: Collier-Macmillan, 1969), p. 39.
15. Dewey, Human Nature and Conduct, p. 166.
16. See Dewey, Art as Experience (New York: Capricorn Books, 1958), and Experience and Nature, Chapter Nine.
17. Dewey, Art As Experience, pp. 15-16.
18. Dewey, Quest for Certainty, p. 3.
19. Ibid., p. 4.
20. Ibid.
21. See Dewey, A Common Faith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960), p. 45.

22. Ibid., p. 1.
23. Ibid., p. 32.
24. Ibid., p. 11.
25. Ibid., pp. 7-8.
26. Ibid., p. 17.
27. Ibid., p. 18.
28. Ibid., p. 17.
29. Ibid., p. 14.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid., p. 12.
32. Ibid., p. 13.
33. Ibid., p. 22.
34. Ibid., p. 23.
35. Ibid., p. 27.
36. Ibid., p. 22.
37. Ibid., p. 23.
38. Ibid.
39. Ibid., p. 48.
40. Ibid., p. 51.
41. Ibid., p. 25.
42. Ibid., p. 53.
43. Ibid., p. 53.
44. Ibid., p. 53.
45. Ibid., p. 26.
46. Ibid.
47. Ibid., p. 25.

48. Ibid., p. 85.
49. Ibid., p. 51.
50. Ibid., p. 53.
51. Ibid., p. 57.
52. Ibid., p. 39.
53. Ibid., p. 9.
54. Ibid.