



# DEWEY STUDIES

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**Mission:**

*Dewey Studies* is a peer-reviewed, online, open-access journal of the John Dewey Society, dedicated to furthering understanding of John Dewey's philosophical work and enlivening his unique mode of engagement with the vital philosophical questions of our time.

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# EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

PAUL BENJAMIN CHERLIN

Minneapolis College

Editor-in-Chief



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The current issue of *Dewey Studies* features three articles and four book reviews. It begins with Thomas M. Alexander's "The Problem of Dewey's 'Metaphysics' and the 'Generic Traits of Existence.'" Alexander, who has long been a leading voice in Dewey scholarship, contributes again to an ongoing conversation concerning the value of Dewey's metaphysical program and the meaning of Dewey's *generic traits of existence*.

Dewey routinely condemned the ways in which philosophical discourse has created problematic divisions or dualisms within nature and human experience (such as those between nature and convention, essence and accident, theory and practice). Dewey eventually offered his own way of understanding "the nature of nature," an empirical, naturalistic metaphysics that would provide the grounds for stability and change, individuation and relation, unity and plurality. While Dewey first invoked "metaphysical inquiry" and his *generic traits of existence* in a 1915 article, it would take another decade for Dewey to return to these concepts and provide a fuller exposition of his metaphysical theory.

Dewey published *Experience and Nature* in 1925. Since its publication, Dewey's book on metaphysics has been subject to many different interpretations, and not a small amount of controversy. Scholars have variously condemned Dewey's metaphysical theory (his general theory of nature) as his greatest philosophical *faux pas*, a kind of blemish upon an otherwise non-metaphysical or anti-metaphysical exposition of human experience, culture, and our unique modes of creating meaning.

Other scholars, including Alexander, have attempted to reveal the importance of Dewey's metaphysics. In this current article, Alexander continues to explore the connection between Dewey's conception of *generic traits of existence* and the classical definition of philosophy as a "love of wisdom" (where "wisdom" encompasses all of the diversity and complexity of lived experience). At a more specific level, Alexander critiques other appropriative interpretations of Dewey's metaphysics, including those offered by Raymond Boisvert and James Garrison.

Our second article, by Shawn F. Higgins, is titled "'THE BENEDICK.' An Analysis of *Talks on Religion* (1908)." Higgins discusses the work of a professor of mathematics at Columbia, Henry Bedinger Mitchell, who hosted a series of salons throughout the academic year of 1906-1907. Focusing on religion and philosophy, these salons were attended by a number of prominent intellectuals in the New York City area. Recorded by a stenographer, these salon discussions were published as a series in the *Theosophical Quarterly*, and subsequently published again by Mitchell in a book titled *Talks on Religion: A Collective Inquiry*. The participants of these salon

conversations, however, were never identified by name, only by their respective professions.

Through a careful and thoroughgoing cross-comparison between *Talks on Religion* and various primary texts, Higgins has identified these participants. They included John Dewey, James Harvey Robinson, F. J. E. Woodbridge, Henry S. Crampton, Charles Johnston, Percy S. Grant, Clement A. Griscom, Jr., Gary N. Calkins, William Pepperell Montague, J. F.B. Mitchell, Livingston Farrand, Dickinson S. Miller, Harold Chapman Brown, and Max Eastman.

Thus, Higgins not only provides us with a greater context for those conversations, he offers us a significant snapshot of Columbia University and its environs in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a time and place in American intellectual discourse that set the tone for much of what later occurred (and continues to be discussed) in American philosophy. It is important to be reminded that our most important intellectual movements involved many contributors who engaged in civil, open-ended discourse in a collaborative environment.

Our third article, “John Dewey and the American Tradition of Socialist Democracy” is by Carlos L. Garrido. Here, Garrido argues that Dewey’s political philosophy is a direct outbranching of a Jeffersonian conception of democracy and hence continues the tradition of socialist democrats of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Moreover, as Garrido writes, “Those who in our country take up the same cause of constructing a new society in which democracy becomes a way of life, and where environmental sustainability and human flourishing are prioritized, are infinitely indebted to the philosophy of John Dewey.”

As it stands, most of our social institutions are feudalistic in orientation—the typical school and the average workplace can hardly be called “democratic” in structure. If we spend the bulk of our time within non-democratic environments, to what extent can we truly claim to *live in* a democracy? If democracy merely amounts to voting every two or four years, to what extent can we claim to *partake in* democratic governance? If we still demand on arranging our values and our facts within a kind of hierarchical master-narrative, can we ever claim to truly *think and feel* democratically?

In a sense, Dewey is asking us to re-create what it means to be a human *person* who partakes in a world that is increasingly interdependent, globalized, and diverse. According to Dewey, the individualism and claims about “inherent rights” featured in the classical liberalism of the 18<sup>th</sup> century are simply not going to be compatible with the realities of the modern world. The socialistic democracy discussed by Garrido is precisely the kind of democracy called for by Dewey because it was adaptable rather

than rigid, embraces inquiry rather than ideology, places the needs of the community above some fabricated set of individual entitlements, and understands *difference* and *conflict* as opportunities for growth.

In Dewey's 1935 book *Liberalism and Social Action*, he sums up what he calls "the problem of achieving freedom" and "the problem of democracy" in the wake of earlier forms of liberalism. Dewey writes:

The problem of achieving freedom was immeasurably widened and deepened. It did not now present itself as a conflict between government and the liberty of individuals in matters of conscience and economic action, but as a problem of establishing an entire social order, possessed of a spiritual authority that would nurture and direct the inner as well as the outer life of individuals. The problem of science was no longer merely technological applications for increase of material productivity, but imbuing the minds of individuals with the spirit of reasonableness, fostered by social organization and contributing to its development. The problem of democracy was seen to be not solved, hardly more than externally touched, by the establishment of universal suffrage and representative government. As Havelock Ellis has said, "We see now that the vote and the ballot-box do not make the voter free from even external pressure; and, which is of much more consequence, they do not necessarily free him from his own slavish instincts." The problem of democracy becomes the problem of that form of social organization, extending to all the areas and ways of living, in which the powers of individuals shall not be merely released from mechanical external constraint but shall be fed, sustained and directed. Such an organization demands much more of education than general schooling, which without a renewal of the springs of purpose and desire becomes a new mode of mechanization and formalization, as hostile to liberty as ever was governmental constraint. It demands of science much more than external technical application-which again leads to mechanization of life and results in a new kind of enslavement. It demands that the method of inquiry, of discrimination, of test by verifiable consequences, be naturalized in all the matters, of large and of detailed scope, that arise for judgment.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Dewey (LW:11:24-25).

We might connect the subject-matter of Alexander's article with that of Garrido's. If metaphysical inquiry identifies the basic patterns of existence or the basic ways in which phenomena might relate, then any effective mode of social organization has to be in rhythm with these pervasive natural patterns. While nature and experience speak against absolutist claims and authoritarian tendencies, Deweyan democracy and its ideals are purposive refinements of existentially generic modes of relating. A "cognizance" of generic traits can inform what Dewey above calls "an entire social order, possessed of a spiritual authority that would nurture and direct the inner as well as the outer life of individuals."

The current issue also contains four book reviews. First, John Capps reviews *Fixing the Climate: Strategies for an Uncertain World* (Princeton, 2022) by Charles F. Sabel and David G. Victor. Second, Robert Friedman reviews *The Ethics, Epistemology, and Politics of Richard Rorty* by Giancarlo Marchetti (Routledge, 2022). Third, Myron Jackson reviews *The Rorty-Habermas Debate: Toward Freedom as Responsibility* by Marcin Kilanowski (SUNY, 2021). And final, Corey McCall reviews Trevor Pearce's *Pragmatism's Evolution* (Chicago, 2020).

In sum, this issue of *Dewey Studies* reflects the depth, variety, and quality of contemporary scholarship in American philosophy. The tradition continues to develop through the creativity and vision of our best scholars.

Paul Benjamin Cherlin, *Editor-in-Chief*  
Minneapolis, November 2022

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This issue of *Dewey Studies* demonstrates the on-going diverse interest in, and influence of, John Dewey throughout the world. The editors ask readers to submit articles to Associate Editor Austin Rooney ([austin.rooney@camden.rutgers.edu](mailto:austin.rooney@camden.rutgers.edu)), ideas for panels and special issues, interviews, research notes to Paul Benjamin Cherlin ([cherlin.paul.b@gmail.com](mailto:cherlin.paul.b@gmail.com)), and book reviews and composite review articles to Reviews Editor Daniel Brunson ([daniel.brunson@morgan.edu](mailto:daniel.brunson@morgan.edu)).

THE PROBLEM OF DEWEY'S  
“METAPHYSICS” AND THE  
“GENERIC TRAITS OF EXISTENCE”

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Dewey's metaphysics has been a problematic topic ever since his move to Columbia in 1905. "The Postulate of Immediate Empiricism" appeared that year, with Dewey taking up James's radical empiricism by declaring that "things ...are as they are experienced as."<sup>1</sup> But at Columbia he also came under the influence of F.J. E. Woodbridge, an Aristotelian naturalist.<sup>2</sup> Whereas Dewey had regarded Aristotle as the philosopher of a fixed hierarchy of ends, Woodbridge made Dewey realize there could be an empirical metaphysics concerned with "existence as existence" apart from any first cause. This is evident in "The Subject-Matter of Metaphysical Inquiry" published in 1915. Dewey rejects there any conception of "metaphysics" devoted to "ultimate origins"; instead, metaphysics should be concerned with "ultimate" or "irreducible traits."<sup>3</sup> These traits are those encountered "in any and every subject of scientific inquiry."<sup>4</sup> The culmination comes with Dewey's *Experience and Nature* (1925) which declares that metaphysics is concerned "with traits and characters that are sure to turn up in every universe of discourse," not just in scientific discourse.<sup>5</sup>

I shall focus upon *Experience and Nature* to explore what Dewey means by the search for the "generic traits of existence." This work, too, has provoked the most diverse responses from Dewey's critics and admirers. Richard Bernstein, sees it as a deeply bifurcated work, a victim of the dualisms Dewey sought to overcome. Richard Gale strangely celebrates the dualisms and urges us to embrace Dewey as a "promethean mystic."<sup>6</sup> The most famous instance is Richard Rorty's essay "Dewey's

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<sup>1</sup> Middle Works 3:158. All references will be to The Collected Works of John Dewey, ed. Jo Ann Boydston.

<sup>2</sup> See Dewey's testimony in his semi-autobiography included in The Philosophy of John Dewey, ed. Paul Schilpp (Northwestern, 1938), p.35.

<sup>3</sup> Middle Works 8: 3-4.

<sup>4</sup> Middle Works 8:4.

<sup>5</sup> Later Works 1: 308.

<sup>6</sup> Richard Bernstein, "John Dewey's Metaphysics of Experience," *The Journal of Philosophy* LVIII (1961), 5-14, and Richard Gale, *John Dewey's Quest for Unity: The Journey of a Promethean Mystic* (Prometheus Books, 2008).

Metaphysics.”<sup>7</sup> There have been spirited defenses of Dewey’s metaphysics.<sup>8</sup> Numerous secondary debates have arisen as well, such as recent efforts to reclaim Dewey as an Hegelian.<sup>9</sup>

Even limiting discussion of Dewey’s metaphysics to the topic of the generic traits raises numerous questions. What does Dewey mean by a “generic trait of existence”? How many are there? How do we discover them? Is the whole of *Experience and Nature* to be regarded as dealing with “generic traits” or just his terse comment about them as providing the “map of criticism”? Is each chapter of *Experience and Nature* to be identified with elucidating one generic trait of existence? Do those chapters devoted to communication, consciousness, art, and value exhibit generic traits of *nature*? And how do the traits work as a “map” for philosophy? My focus here will be upon the relationship between the generic traits and their relation to primary experience as a “map” for intelligent conduct.

While it is commonplace to describe *Experience and Nature* as “Dewey’s metaphysics,” Dewey’s overt definition of metaphysics restricts it to the empirical description of the generic traits: “If we follow classical terminology, philosophy is love of wisdom, while metaphysics is cognizance of the generic traits of existence.”<sup>10</sup> This initial description comes in the illuminating context of Dewey’s discussion of the precarious and the stable, where he argues that the precarious and incomplete are as much features of existence as the stable though philosophy has privileged the stable as “more real,” be it as Forms, substances, atoms, logical facts, etc. But Dewey is not just saying the precarious is *also* “real.” I think he is saying that “the-stable-and-the-precarious” or, rather, the stable-precarious, is *one* trait, not two. When we make them two separate traits, we have already made possible the dualisms the tradition has produced. Rather, think of the stable-precarious as a *continuum*, a pervasive feature of

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<sup>7</sup> Reprinted in *Consequences of Pragmatism* (Univ. of Minnesota, 1982); the essay was presented in 1975 and subsequently published in Stephen Cahn, ed., *New Studies in the Philosophy of John Dewey* (Univ. Press of New England, 1977).

<sup>8</sup> William T. Myers and Gregory Pappas, “Dewey’s Metaphysics: A Response to Richard Gale,” *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, Vol. 40, No 4, 679-700 (2004), Raymond Boisvert, *Dewey’s Metaphysics* (Fordham, 1988). Thomas Alexander, *John Dewey’s Theory of Art, Experience, and Nature* (SUNY Press, 1987).

<sup>9</sup> See the articles by Alexander, Boisvert, Sleeper and Stuhr in *Transactions of the Charles S Peirce Society*, Vol..XXVIII (1992) and James Good, *A Search for Unity in Diversity* (Lexington, 2006).

<sup>10</sup> LW 1: 30.

the world we inhabit. We only see one aspect because of the other. “Cognizance” means finding *both* stability and precariousness as pervasively omnipresent, interpenetrating, and mutually implicated. Take mathematics as an example. It is easy for us to think of mathematics appearing in the guise of the stable—Plato’s ideal numbers contrasting with the river of physical events. Didn’t Plato find “the stable” and “the precarious”? Yes, but he separated them as two different traits and so two different ontological orders. Dewey’s point is to ask us to see the precarious in the stable and the stable in the precarious. How is the precarious manifest in mathematics? The Pythagoreans apparently regarded the incommensurability of the diagonal to the side of a square as a scandal to be hidden. Or consider Russell’s Paradox that upended Frege’s life’s work.<sup>11</sup> By “cognizance,” then, Dewey does not mean superficial awareness that the world has some things that are transitory and others that are not but that these features are found together; nature does not divide itself into “realms.” Our preference for stability arises from our engagement with the precarious just as our desire for the precarious—such as desire for risky behavior—may arise from too much stability. If this approach is right, then a generic trait helps us to see experience as a continuum, not as a set of “compartments”—if anything, it prevents us from compartmentalization.

Let us now look at Dewey’s most explicit statement of what he conceives metaphysics to be. It comes at the very end of *Experience and Nature*:

If philosophy be criticism, what is to be said of the relation of philosophy to metaphysics? For metaphysics, as a statement of the generic traits manifested by existences of all kinds without regard for their differentiation into physical and mental, seems to have nothing to do with criticism and choice, with an effective love of wisdom. It begins and ends with analysis and definition. When it has revealed the traits and characters that are sure to turn up in every universe of discourse, its work is done. So the argument may run. But the very nature of the traits discovered in every theme of discourse, since they are irreducible traits of natural existence, forbids such a conclusion. Qualitative individuality and constant relations, contingency and need, movement and arrest are common traits of all existence. This fact is a source both of values and of their precariousness; both of immediate possession which is casual and

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<sup>11</sup> Russell sent his discovery to Frege even as the second volume of his *Grundgesetze der Arithmetik* was in press—making it precarious to Frege’s sense of accomplishment as well.



of reflections which is a precondition of secure attainment and appropriation. Any theory that detects and defines these traits is therefore but a ground-map of the province of criticism, establishing baselines to be employed in more intricate triangulations.<sup>12</sup>

Metaphysics as the empirical inquiry into the generic traits of existence as existence is undertaken for the sake of wisdom in conduct. And that is Dewey's basic conception of what philosophy as "love of wisdom" should be. We need metaphysics as a map to live wisely.

Dewey's metaphor of the generic traits as a "map" has received close discussion by both Raymond Boisvert and Jim Garrison.<sup>13</sup> Boisvert notes that maps cannot be exact reproductions of the territory they map. If they were, they would be useless—the map would need a map as much as what it was a map of. Royce thought of a map that was so exact it included itself—and everything contained in it and so on *ad infinitum*. Such a map would be useless. Maps must be abstract to be signs and guides to actions. Boisvert notes that maps and metaphysics both: (1) are based on certain interests, such as "being qua being" or "reality vs appearance," (2) involve selectivity and choice, and (3) are provisional and subject to correction or improvement.<sup>14</sup> The Mercator projection interpreted a sphere in terms of a cylinder and unrolled the cylinder, giving us the familiar map of our schoolrooms with its sense of the huge expanses of Canada, Greenland and Antarctica. Its primary purpose was for sailing, not for showing relative size of land masses. Likewise the Greek concern with form as a tool of classification was a useful but distorting interest as was the modern concern with a theory of mathematical matter for the sake of control. Boisvert, however, is critical of the "generic traits" as useful, claiming that Dewey had a more fruitful approach in pointing to "prototypes" or exemplary instances of what is primarily real, such as fields of events and ultimate complexity.<sup>15</sup> These bring out

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<sup>12</sup> *Later Works* 1: 308-09.

<sup>13</sup> And by Steven Fesmire in *Dewey* (Routledge, 2015), p. 53f.

<sup>14</sup> Raymond Boisvert, "Dewey's Metaphysics," in *Reading Dewey*, Larry Hickman, ed. (Indiana University Press, 1998, p. 150. Compare Boisvert's remarks with Dewey, *Later Works* 12 (*Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*): 398.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 158-59; see also Boisvert's "Metaphysics as the Search for Paradigmatic Instances," *Transactions of the Charles S Peirce Society* 28 (1992), 189-202. Boisvert here seems to be thinking of Aristotle's attempt to find a "*pros hen*" way of determining the meaning of being instead of the search for "being as being"

Dewey's nonreductive interactional process view of nature better than his language of generic traits.

Garrison explores how the "map" of generic traits can be clarified in light of Dewey's theory of judgment, especially as presented in *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*. Maps, he argues, function as "propositions (especially logical and mathematical universals) as well as ever-evolving guides to unending inquiry in an unfinished and unfinishable universe."<sup>16</sup> Garrison emphasizes that abstractions, including the generic traits, are fashioned from the raw material of primary experience in order to illuminate it, not as substitutions for it. They are "products of inquiry." Garrison comments, "We only make maps after making the journey and surveying the land."<sup>17</sup> Thus generic traits cannot be retroactively projected in their refined forms back into the original world of experience without committing "the Philosophical Fallacy." Maps exist for the sake of further experience, for those making journeys, and are not ends in themselves. The aim of inquiry is the transformation of conflicted, vague, or indeterminate experience into an integrated, meaningful situation, and judgments function as the outcome of inquiry. Dewey contrasts this terminating role of judgment with the intermediary role of propositions within inquiry.<sup>18</sup> Garrison says, "Given that maps are propositions, they only have a symbolic mediating status that we must never confuse with existential traits; the map is not the territory."<sup>19</sup> This leads Garrison to some striking conclusions. Generic traits are operational functions that "impose their forms on existence" and "universals are *logical* not ontological."<sup>20</sup> He adds, "Since maps exemplify what it is to be propositional, including universal propositions, we may confidently conjecture that Dewey has a logical, in his sense of

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approach announced in Book IV of the *Metaphysics*. The "*pros hen*" ("with respect to which") approach seeks instances of *ousia* that exemplify being in a supreme way, and this turns out to be the Unmoved Mover of *Meta. XII*. A broadly descriptive account of being as being turns into "onto-theology," as Heidegger says.

<sup>16</sup> James W. Garrison, "Dewey on Metaphysics, Meaning Making, and Maps," *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, Vol. 41, No. 4 (2005), 818-44.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 820.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 822; see *Later Works 12 (Logic: The Theory of Inquiry)*: 125, 138, 283.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 825. What Dewey actually says in the passage Garrison cites to support this claim is "The problem of the relation of universals to individuals is a logical rather than an ontological one." "What Are Universals?" LW 11:109-10. As operations they "rest upon existential operations."

logical, not ontological metaphysics.”<sup>21</sup> Universals are *possibilities* and are subject to revision. Indeed, the universe is subject to revision, especially when new ideas guide conduct. Garrison concludes that maps actually can transform both their users and their territories. Maps can be criticized, re-evaluated, and modified; thus, in conceiving of metaphysics as a “map” of the generic traits of existence, as tools of criticism, and philosophy as love of wisdom, we must retain the idea of criticism and change in metaphysics itself.

Thus Boisvert offers us a dilemma regarding Dewey’s metaphysics and Garrison a paradox. The dilemma Boisvert sets is between metaphysics as the search for the generic traits of existence as existence and metaphysics as the search for prototypical candidates of the real. Given this choice, I think we have to answer (with Plato’s Eleatic Stranger) “both.”<sup>22</sup> Garrison offers the paradox of a metaphysics without ontology. While Garrison makes many acute points, especially in recalling that metaphysics falls within the “pattern of inquiry,” there is a burgeoning dualism in his tendency to dichotomize logic and ontology (reinforced, admittedly, by Dewey’s own language). Garrison concludes by stressing the importance of the idea of possibility and its relation to actual existence, and, I maintain, the relation of possibility to actuality not only is “ontology,” it happens to be the core of Dewey’s mature philosophy: Nature is the intertwining of the actual and the possible; intelligence is seeing the possible in the actual; wisdom is discerning lifeworthy possibilities in present situations.

In my limited response, I will try to state what *Experience and Nature* is and how metaphysics fits in with it. This will give us a way of understanding why Dewey should want something like a list of the generic traits of nature or existence. Finally I will propose how one comes to recognize them and thereby see how they operate as the basis for wisdom in philosophy.

Of the ten chapters of *Experience and Nature*, nine have either “Nature” or “Existence” in the title (these terms are synonymous in Dewey’s lexicon). The first chapter, being concerned with method, has “experience” instead of “existence.” James Gouinlock proposed distinguishing Dewey’s “philosophy of nature” from his metaphysics, but it’s a hard distinction to maintain.<sup>23</sup> A philosophy of nature, he says, is an inclusive account of all we experience nature to be. But if nature has generic traits, then these must be acknowledged at some point by a philosophy of nature.

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 826.

<sup>22</sup> See Plato, *Sophist* 249d.

<sup>23</sup> James Gouinlock, *John Dewey’s Philosophy of Value* (Humanities, 1972), p.1.

Dewey is emphatic that he is not proposing metaphysics as a science. But he is equally emphatic it is empirical. But, as we know, what Dewey means by “experience” is not what most philosophers mean. For him it means “culture,” the ways humans inhabit the world, from the Inuit in a kayak to an American academic at a conference. It is the world of “primary experience,” the world as lived, undergone, “had”—the world of birth, death, dreams, dancing, hope, heartbreak, war, parenting, ambition, forgiveness, and foolishness. It is not the world as *known*, except insofar as knowing is “had” before there can be knowing as *doing*.<sup>24</sup> It should be clear that this is a “pre-metaphysical world.” It is not divided into Being and Becoming or Mind and Body or even into Subject and Predicate.<sup>25</sup>

Metaphysics, as a conscious, self-reflective pursuit arises very late in history, long after cultural values, practices, myths, and technology have shaped experience. The method of “naturalistic humanism” or “cultural naturalism” Dewey advocates therefore asks that we look at *cultures* to begin to discern the broad outlines of the generic traits. For example, looking at everything from common superstitions to the field of technology reflects the aleatory and precarious way we are in the world. A spear testifies to the need for hunting or defense. It also testifies to a level of structure and order in nature as well as to human craft and forethought. Out of such examples Dewey will bring into focus the generic traits of: the precarious-and-stable, qualitative immediacy, relational mediation, interaction, and so on. Generic traits arise from the world of lived experience, refer back to it, and, ultimately, make it more meaningful. As generic, they will function to help us see how a spear and a birthday *both* denote the precarious-stable. Generic traits also inhibit the tendency to dichotomize and isolate existence into separate “realms” or “levels” or “categories.” As descriptive, they work against promoting some experiences as “more real” or “higher” than others. We might value, say, clarity and truth over obscurity and error or the actual over the possible. But both belong to experience. Hence philosophy’s long identification of the real (as actual) and the object of knowledge is undercut by metaphysics in this sense.

Return to the example of “the-precarious-and-the-stable.” The effort to designate it a generic trait means that it should crop up, sooner or later, in every human experience. For Dewey this doesn’t mean we confine our attention to offhand, obvious examples, but look at those we are tempted to isolate as one or the other. I

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<sup>24</sup> *Later Works* 1: 74-76.

<sup>25</sup> See quotation from *Later Works* 1: 308 above: “For metaphysics, as a statement of the generic traits manifested by existences of all kinds without regard for their differentiation into physical and mental...”

used the example of mathematics as offering instances of the precarious. But sometimes change is stability, like the healthy homeostasis of the body. A mountain range may symbolize the stable and enduring for people dwelling nearby, but to a geologist it may show the changes of the earth's tectonic plates, perhaps with the volatile consequences of a Vesuvius or Mount St. Helen's. The pervasive nature of this trait may be present not only in a baby's birth or a young man's funeral but even in the simple celebration of a child's birthday, for if we were immortal birthdays would be meaningless. A child's birthday a hundred years ago was celebrated with a greater sense of the fragility of life (as Dewey intimately knew) before so many diseases were held at bay. Precariousness and stability are implicit in every aspect of our lives: in buildings, occupations, songs, vacations, addictions, and religions. At first glance these may seem separate: a birthday is not a funeral and a home is not a road. It is this facile separation that, Dewey believes, inhibits us from seeing through the differences. The Buddha's awakening grasped the inherent impermanence and interconnection of all things so that we "see through" any pretenses to their claims as absolutes.

One can read the chapters of *Experience and Nature*, then, as descriptive accounts of various generic traits. If Chapter Two is Dewey's "Fire Sermon" on the rhythms of impermanence, Chapter Three gives us the trait of obdurate finitude, qualitative suchness, surd thatness. Chapter Four gives us the trait of temporal extension, possibility, relations, structure, or action. Chapter Five gives us interaction, copresence, society. Chapter Six gives us individuation, selectivity, especially individuality as mind, the creative use of intelligence. Chapter Seven presents emergence—how there is continuity in nature so that the new, even as it arises from the old, gives us its own insight into what nature is and does. The more complex, Dewey says, actually tells us more about nature than the simple.<sup>26</sup> Chapter Eight gives us the "field theory of existence" as applied to human situations in which consciousness is a guiding element. Chapter Nine looks at the possibility of intelligence as art, that is, where the events of nature may be guided toward the realization of inherent meaning and value, the consummatory. Chapter Ten opens this up to the possibility of intelligent living, of wise conduct. Are these all traits of "existence as existence"? Consciousness? Art? The moral life? Aren't these at best "parts" or "aspects" of nature? To go back to Dewey's comment about complexity revealing more about nature than simplicity, the flowering of human life shows us its possibility in nature. It is a generic trait of nature that, here and there, it may realize such fruits.

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<sup>26</sup> *Later Works* 1: 201.

Generic traits belong to existence or nature; though they are refinements in reflection of prereflective experience they can prevent our tendencies to dichotomize experience and instead look carefully at it. Quality does not present itself as “in the mind” any more than stability comes marked as transcendent Being. Prototypes alone cannot accomplish this. Existence includes its possibilities, so we must keep logic grounded in natural ontology. The generic traits are ways of keeping experience connected, working against our tendencies to compartmentalize. They are maps showing the various ways of nature so that we avoid reductionisms and dualisms or any system that makes experience opaque.

“THE BENEDICK.”  
AN ANALYSIS OF TALKS ON  
RELIGION (1909)

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During the academic year of 1906-1907 a series of informal monthly salons were held in New York to discuss religion, science, and philosophy. The fifteen participants of this forum were an alloy of Theosophists, professors from Columbia University, and other notable men in the environs of New York. They were John Dewey, Henry Bedinger Mitchell, James Harvey Robinson, Frederick J. E. Woodbridge, Henry S. Crampton, Charles Johnston, Percy S. Grant, Clement A. Griscom, Jr., Gary N. Calkins, William Pepperell Montague, John F.B. Mitchell, Livingston Farrand, Dickinson S. Miller, Harold Chapman Brown, and Max Eastman.

In January 1907, the first in a series of articles titled "Talks on Religion," appeared in the pages of *The Theosophical Quarterly*.<sup>1</sup> Their author, Henry Bedinger Mitchell, was an adjunct professor of mathematics at Columbia University, and president of the New York Branch (NYB) of the Griscom Theosophical Society (GTS.) The articles, a transcript of conversations held in Mitchell's rooms at The Benedick Apartments (80 Washington Square East, New York) during the academic year of 1906-1907, were prefaced by Mitchell with the following statement:<sup>2</sup>

In one of the larger Western cities some twelve or more men had come together in the rooms of one of their number. Drawn partly from among the professors of the local university, partly from the business, literary and ecclesiastic life of the city at large, this small gathering represented many widely differing types of character and mental occupations. The names of these men are of little moment to the general reader, and reticence upon them is the more desirable in that not a few bear international reputations and all are well known in their own fields. Yet it has seemed to the writer that the purposes of this meeting and the conversation which followed would be of interest to many could they be faithfully recorded, and though he can only write from his own memory, and so must often be content to repeat badly

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<sup>1</sup> Mitchell, Henry Bedinger. "Talks On Religion I." *The Theosophical Quarterly*. Vol. IV., No. 3. (January, 1907): 227-240; Mitchell, Henry Bedinger. "Talks On Religion II." *The Theosophical Quarterly*. Vol. IV., No. 4. (April, 1907): 299-312; Mitchell, Henry Bedinger. "Talks On Religion III." *The Theosophical Quarterly*. Vol. V., No. 1. (July, 1907): 27-37; Mitchell, Henry Bedinger. "Talks On Religion IV." *The Theosophical Quarterly*. Vol. V., No. 2. (October, 1907): 136-150; Mitchell, Henry Bedinger. "Talks On Religion V." *The Theosophical Quarterly*. Vol. V., No. 3. (January, 1908): 259-272.

<sup>2</sup> Columbia University. *Columbia University Catalogue And General Announcements: 1906-1907*. Columbia University Press (1906) [Directory of Officers: 1-16.]



what was first stated well, he believes that no other substantial injustice will be done to the views themselves. A—, the host of the evening, was a young man, a mathematician by profession, but who had been deeply interested in religious questions for many years. It fell to him to explain the purpose of the meetings and to open the discussion.<sup>3</sup>

The articles, published as the book, *Talks on Religion*, in 1908, preserved the anonymity of the participants, assigning only letters, and identifying them by their trade and profession:

ASSIGNED LETTER	TITLE.	DESCRIPTION.
A.	The Mathematician.	A Professor of Mathematics and Student of Religion.
B.	The Historian.	A Professor of History well known for his researches into the history of the Middle Ages and the part played therein by the Church.”
C.	The Philosopher.	A Professor of Philosophy.
D.	The Zoologist.	A Professor of Zoology.
E.	The Author.	A Writer and Orientalist best known for his translations from the Upanishads.
F.	The Clergyman.	A Clergyman of the Protestant Episcopal Church.

<sup>3</sup> Mitchell, Henry Bedinger. “Talks On Religion I.” *The Theosophical Quarterly*. Vol. IV., No. 3. (January, 1907): 227-240.

G.	The Editor.	A Member of the Society of Friends by birth and education a Man of Business by force of circumstances, a Student and Editor of a religious Journal by avocation.
H.	The Biologist.	A Professor of Biology.
I.	The Social Philosopher.	A Professor of Philosophy much interested in Socialism.
J.	The Banker.	A Banker and Man of Business, formerly an officer in the United States Army.
K.	The Pragmatist.	A Professor of Philosophy and one of the foremost exponents of Individualism and Pragmatism.
L.	The Anthropologist.	A Professor of Anthropology.
M.	The Oxonian.	A Professor of Philosophy much interested in Psychology and an earnest Churchman.
N.	The Logician.	The Logician: An Instructor of Logic.
O.	The Youth.	An Assistant in Philosophy. <sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Mitchell, Henry Bedinger. *Talks On Religion: A Collective Inquiry*. Longmans, Green, and Co. New York, New York (1908): ix-x.

The nine chapters of *Talks*, corresponding to the nine monthly meetings recorded by Mitchell are titled:

CHAPTER I:	THE NATURE OF THE INQUIRY.
CHAPTER II:	CHRISTIANITY AND NATURE.
CHAPTER III:	EVOLUTION AND ETHICS.
CHAPTER IV:	POWER, WORTH, AND REALITY.
CHAPTER V:	MYSTICISM AND FAITH.
CHAPTER VI:	THE HISTORIAN'S VIEW.
CHAPTER VII:	ORGANIZATION AND RELIGION.
CHAPTER VIII:	SIGNS OF THE TIMES.
CHAPTER IX:	HAS THE CHURCH FAILED?

This paper seeks to identify the participants of these *Talks* by excavating the contents of Mitchell's discussions and support these arguments with cross-textual evidence. After making a case for the true identities of the participants, the paper seeks to locate the time said discussions occurred by using the aforementioned method. The paper, therefore, will be divided into two sections, "Participants," and "Timeline." The concluding portion of the paper, "Epilogue" will address the aftermath of these *Talks*.

## PART I: PARTICIPANTS

### (B.) THE HISTORIAN

“A Professor of History well known for his researches into the history of the Middle Ages and the part played therein by the Church.”

James Harvey Robinson. (1863-1936.) Assistant professor in European history at the University of Pennsylvania, 1891-1895; professor of history at Columbia University, 1895-1919; acting dean of Barnard College, 1900; Co-founder and first Director of the New School for Social Research, 1919.<sup>5</sup>

One of the leading American historians of the twentieth century, Robinson's *History of Western Europe* (1903) was regarded as “little short of a revelation in historical method when it was published.” As a champion of the progressive movement Robinson would state that a liberal was “one who believes in the possibility of conscious progress,” while a conservative was one who was “not yet aware of it.” Between 1907 and 1917, Robinson would produce several books, lectures, and articles, designed to push Americans toward a progressive perspective of history.<sup>6</sup> It was Robinson's dissatisfaction with history that first led him to becoming a historian, and his goal of reforming the methodology of that discipline would be a lifelong pursuit.<sup>7</sup> In *Readings in European History* (1904,) Robinson writes:

Admitting the force of this argument, there is, nevertheless, so much to be learned from a study of the original accounts that cannot be reproduced by the most skilled hand, that no earnest student or reader should content himself

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<sup>5</sup> “School Solely For Social Research To Open Here Monday.” *The New York Tribune*. (New York, New York.) February 8, 1919. “History Professor Quits Columbia.” *The New York Times*. (New York, New York) May 6, 1919; “James H. Robinson, Historian, Is Dead.” *The New York Times*. (New York, New York) February 17, 1936; Hendricks, Luther V. “James Harvey Robinson and the New School for Social Research.” *The Journal of Higher Education*. Vol. XX. No. 1 (January, 1949): 1–58; Rutkoff, P. M.; Scott, W. B. *New School*. Simon and Schuster. New York, New York. (1986): 5-7.

<sup>6</sup> Breisach, Ernst. *American Progressive History: An Experiment in Modernization*. University of Chicago Press. Chicago, Illinois. (1993): 64.

<sup>7</sup> “James H. Robinson, Historian, Is Dead.” *The New York Times*. (New York, New York) February 17, 1936.

with second-hand descriptions when primary sources are available. [...] The sources are unconsciously molded by the spirit of the time in which they were written. Every line gives some hint of the period in which the author lived and makes an impression upon us which volumes of second-hand accounts can never produce. The mere information, too, comes to us in a form which we do not easily forget. The facts sink into our memory. [...] Moreover the study of the sources enables us, to some extent, to form our own opinions of the past. [...] When we get at the sources themselves, we no longer merely read and memorize, we begin to consider what may be safely inferred from the statements before us, and so develop the all important faculty of criticism. We are not simply accumulating facts, but are attempting to determine their true nature and meaning. The power to do this is not alone necessary to scholarly work; it is of the utmost importance as well in dealing with the affairs of everyday life. [...] By cultivating sympathy and impartiality in dealing with the past we may hope to reach a point where we can view the present coolly and temperately.<sup>8</sup>

We find “The Historian” expressing similar views in a discussion with “The Mathematician,” in the final chapter of *Talks*:

I wish [...] that we could wipe out all the second-hand opinions of history, all the overgrowth of tradition and prejudice, and force the world back in each case to the original records, or, let us say, a clear translation of them, for its information. Perhaps, then, we could see things as they were. But now it is all overlaid with centuries of imaginings. Do you know what has done us the most harm? It is the dramatic and literary instinct. It requires constant watchfulness not to write drama rather than history; to keep oneself down to the bare facts which are known to us, and not weave around them a fabric of our own. And it is simply astounding how error perpetuates itself; how something once printed is quoted and assumed, and appears and reappears again and again, in the most diverse places, till you can scarcely believe so much could have sprung from so little. Until we popularize the sources we shall never be able to separate the facts from the fictions which cling to them. After all, there is no study so fascinating; for it is our own nature that history

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<sup>8</sup> Robinson, James Harvey. *Readings in European History*. Vol.I. Ginn & Company. Boston, Massachusetts. (1904): 5-7.

reveals to us. History is the great enlightener. If we would only live by its light! [...] The ordinary clerical attitude toward the Church, particularly towards its creeds and dogmas, would be simply inconceivable if their actual historic origin and development were understood. I do not know what the reason of it is. Partly, I suppose, the tendency to repeat error, like parrots, from which we all suffer. And more, I suspect, is accounted for by our habit of leaving what we learn unassimilated; isolated in its own pigeonhole.<sup>9</sup>

Five months after this discussion between “The Mathematician” and “The Historian,” we find Robinson ventilating similar views in a letter published in *The New York Times*:

In this sense history is “antiquated,” it is relatively a “dead failure,” and a bore. There are undreamed of possibilities in the utilization of the past to illuminate the present.” I cited one of these—the war on poverty to which so much and such varied energy is now directed. Only history can explain why this war could hardly have begun in earnest before the opening of the nineteenth century; how new campaigns have been planned from time to time, and how old hopes have been quenched and fresh ones taken their place. It will doubtless be a long time before history will be understood as the way in which the things in which we are (or ought to be) now interested came about.<sup>10</sup>

### (C.) THE PHILOSOPHER

“A Professor of Philosophy.”

Frederick James Eugene Woodbridge (1867-1940.) Professor at the University of Michigan, 1894-1902; Johnsonian Professor of Philosophy at Columbia University, 1902-1937; President of the Western Philosophical Association, 1903-1904; co-founder of *The Journal of Philosophy, Psychology, and Scientific Methods*, 1904; President of American Philosophical Association, 1911-1912; Dean of the Faculties of Political Science, Philosophy, and Pure Science at Columbia University, 1912-1929.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Mitchell, *Talks*, 312-314.

<sup>10</sup> Robinson, James Harvey. “‘Antiquated’ History.” *The New York Times*. (New York, New York) December 13, 1907.

<sup>11</sup> Shook, John R. (ed.) *Dictionary of Modern American Philosophers*. Thoemmes. Bristol, England. (2005): 2641.

Woodbridge had a history with Mitchell and the GTS at least three years before the *Talks*. In 1903, a year after accepting the faculty position at Columbia, and a year before launching *The Journal of Philosophy, Psychology, and Scientific Methods*, which he co-founded with J. McKeen Cattell, Woodbridge delivered a lecture titled “Appeal of Idealism,” before the Griscom T.S.<sup>12</sup> Clues supporting Woodbridge’s participation in the *Talks* can be found when examining statements made by “The Philosopher” made throughout the text. In chapter eight we find “The Philosopher” stating:

As most of you know, I have been devoting a good deal of time in the last ten years to a fairly close and critical study of Aristotle. At first I was attracted by his logic, but of late I am finding that the moral and religious aspect of his philosophy is growing more and more important to me; and I confess to being puzzled, and not a little amazed, at the completeness of the neglect which has befallen it. The Greek ideals of art and of beauty have endured. Their sculpture, their temples, their poetry remain as inspirations to our later age. Their logic and their science are the foundations of our own. But their religious attitude has been forgotten, and their metaphysics buried in an obscurity their temples have escaped. We look back upon the Greek Gods with the half-pitying, half-patronizing feelings of maturity for youth—as though these were unformed, childish imaginings we had outgrown. In truth, few of us have ever taken the trouble to understand them, to comprehend the interpretation of the universe for which they stood, or to master the developed and co-ordinated scheme of life given us by such a thinker as Aristotle. It is just this scheme of things which I should like to suggest as a possible solution for the Social Philosopher’s difficulties.<sup>13</sup>

It is during this period when we find the growing influence of Aristotle on Woodbridge’s conception of metaphysics being articulated.<sup>14</sup> On March 18, 1908, less than a year after “The Philosopher” discussed Aristotle and metaphysics, Woodbridge delivered a lecture at Columbia University titled “Metaphysics” in which he states:

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<sup>12</sup> “T.S. Activities.” *The Theosophical Quarterly*. Vol. I, No. 3 (January, 1904): 94-99; “T.S. Activities.” *The Theosophical Quarterly*. Vol. I, No. 4 (April, 1904): 130-132.

<sup>13</sup> Mitchell, *Talks*, 297-299.

<sup>14</sup> Jones, William Frank. *Nature and Natural Science: The Philosophy of Frederick J.E. Woodbridge*. Prometheus Books. Buffalo, New York. (1983): 34.

We thus return to Aristotle's conception of a science of existence as existence, a specialized and restricted science, doing its own work and not that of the mathematician or the physicist or the biologist, or of any other investigator, a science which should take its place in that system of sciences the aim of which is to reveal to us with growing clearness the world in which we live. It was that science which Andronicus of Rhodes called "Metaphysics," baptizing it in the name of ambiguity, confusion, and idiosyncrasy...I proceed to sketch the general bearings of metaphysics, pointing out how, beginning with analysis and description, it tends to become speculative, and to construct systems of metaphysics which aim at complete conceptions of the universe and have a certain relevancy to science, morals, and religion...Either because Aristotle developed his science of existence with so much skill or because the science is to be reckoned, as he reckoned it, among those intellectual performances which are excellent, its unfortunate name has never completely obscured its professed aims and restrictions. Too often, indeed, metaphysics has been made the refuge of ignorance, and inquirers in other fields have been too ready to bestow upon their own unsolved problems and inconsistencies.<sup>15</sup>

Elsewhere in the *Talks* we find "The Philosopher" states:

When one begins to look about him and reflect upon the life in which he finds himself, he sees first a world of mechanism, a world of physical forces and phenomena, in which, and upon which, he must act—and which react upon him. His education, his training, his whole experience, have made him familiar with this world; indeed, his existence itself depends upon his at least partial mastery of and obedience to the laws of the mechanism of life. He sees himself in a great net of mechanism, binding him not only to physical nature but to his fellows; a mechanism operative in moral and social life as in purely animal or physical life. So his first view of the world is that of a mechanical world, of facts and forces, all bound together, all acting and reacting one upon the other, and of which he is a part.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> "A Novel Lecture Series." *The Columbia Spectator*. (New York, New York) October 14, 1907; Woodbridge, Frederick. J.E. *Metaphysics*. Columbia University Press. New York, New York. (1908): 8-9.

<sup>16</sup> Mitchell, *Talks*, 13-14.



This bears a resemblance to statements made by Woodbridge in “Naturalism And Humanism,” found in the October, 1907, issue of *The Hibbert Journal*:

Wherever he turns, it is mechanism which confronts him and mechanical methods which commend themselves. He has by no means thought the matter out to a liberal acceptance of it and its consequences. It has been forced upon him without his free consenting, as a thing inevitable, aggressive, and dominating. Did we consult our inclinations and preferences we might choose a more personal world, peopled with divinities responsive to our moods and their expression...To personify the world with success, it must be done instinctively and spontaneously, with no meddling intellect to stop the free impulse; but how can one personify the world if he is convinced that it is essentially mechanical?<sup>17</sup>

(D.) THE ZOOLOGIST

“A Professor of Zoology.”

Henry Edward Crampton (1875-1956.) Assistant in biology at Columbia University, 1893-1895. Instructor of biology at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1895-1896; lecturer at Columbia University, 1896-1897; curator of invertebrate zoology at the *American Museum of Natural History*, 1909; faculty member at Barnard College, 1899; professor of zoology at Barnard College and Columbia University, 1904-1943; Acting provost at Barnard in 1918-1919.<sup>18</sup>

In 1906 Crampton was just beginning his major series of studies on the “variation, geographical distribution, and evolution of the Polynesian land snails of genus *Partula*.” In the spring of 1907 Crampton embarked on an expedition to Tahiti, and surrounding islands, to conduct a momentous study which cataloged the prodigious variations in species he witnessed. The result of Crampton’s labors was the work, *Studies on the Variation, Distribution and Evolution of the Genus Partula*, which evolutionary biologist, Stephen Jay Gould, considered “among the most important in

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<sup>17</sup> Woodbridge, Frederick. J.E. “Naturalism And Humanism.” *The Hibbert Journal*. Vol. VI, No. 1. (October, 1907): 1-17.

<sup>18</sup> Crampton, Henry E. “This Is My Birthday.” *The Freeport Journal-Standard*. (Freeport, Illinois) January 5, 1909; Osborn, Henry Fairfield. *The American Museum of Natural History*. The Irving Press. New York, New York. (1911): 61; “Prof. Crampton Dies; Was Noted Zoologist.” *The Barnard Bulletin*. (New York, New York) March 1, 1956.

the history of evolutionary biology.”<sup>19</sup> Remarking on this expedition in 1934, Mitchell would state, “One of my former colleagues at Columbia spent many years of his life collecting snails from a single island in the South Pacific.”<sup>20</sup> Reference to Crampton’s first expedition to the South Pacific can be found in *Talks*. The “Mathematician” states: “The late spring had finally passed into summer...The Zoologist had sailed for the *South Pacific*, seeking further data for his researches into the origin and mutation of species.”<sup>21</sup>

Other clues are found when comparing statements made by “The Zoologist” to those made by Crampton. During the time in which *Talks* occurred, Crampton was delivering the Hewitt Lectures of Columbia University at Cooper Union. In one of these lectures Crampton states:

Sometimes a single tapeworm, parasitic in the human body, will produce three hundred million embryos; the fact that this animal is relatively rare diverts our attention from the alarming fertility of the species and the excessive rate of its natural increase. Perhaps the most amazing figures are those established by the students of bacteria and other microorganisms.<sup>22</sup>

We find “The Zoologist” making a similar statement in *Talks*:

From a biological point of view at least, there is little ground for idealizing nature’s processes. If, for example, one takes the biological idea of “good,” that is, that which tends to fulfill the two first biological laws of preservation of individual life and the preservation of the species, one sees waste and evil on

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<sup>19</sup> “Evolution Evidences In Mollusks.” *The New York Tribune*. (New York, New York) May 9, 1907; Hamersly, Lewis Randolph. (ed.) *Men and Women of America: A Biographical Dictionary of Contemporaries*. L.R. Hamersly & Company. New York, New York (1910): 417; Provine, William B. *Sewall Wright and Evolutionary Biology*. University of Chicago Press. Chicago, Illinois. (1989): 229; Cronin, Helena. *The Ant and the Peacock: Altruism and Sexual Selection from Darwin to Today*. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge, England (1993): 90; Gould, Stephen Jay. *Eight Little Piggies: Reflections in Natural History*. Vintage Books. London, England. (2007) 29-31.

<sup>20</sup> “T.S. Activities.” *The Theosophical Quarterly*. Vol. XXXII, No. 1. (July, 1934): 41-80.

<sup>21</sup> Mitchell, *Talks*, 262.

<sup>22</sup> Crampton, Henry Edward. *The Doctrine of Evolution: Its Basis and Scope*. Columbia University Press. New York, New York (1924): 123.

all sides. One need only appeal to the familiar examples of blight and storm, earthquake and hurricane, which in sheer wanton destruction undo the long, slow work of years; or to the cruelty of this cannibalistic scheme whereby life feeds on life; or again to the process of reproduction itself. Consider, for instance, the poor little tape-worm, which has to lay three hundred million eggs that one may survive and come to fruition.<sup>23</sup>

(E.) THE AUTHOR.

“A Writer and Orientalist best known for his translations from the Upanishads.”

Charles Johnston (1867-1931.) Bengal Civil Service, 1886-1892; Instructor of Sanskrit, 1892; journalist, 1891-1931; lecturer of history, Columbia University, 1905-1908; Special Lecturer in Political Science at the University of Wisconsin, 1908; military intelligence, 1916-1919; instructor at the Russian Seminary (Tenafly, New Jersey,) 1917; Chairman of the Executive Committee of the (Griscom) Theosophical Society until his death in 1931.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Mitchell, *Talks*, 52.

<sup>24</sup> [Bengal Civil Service] *The Dublin University Calendar For The Year 1889*. The Dublin University Press. Dublin, Ireland. (1889): 6; Johnston, Charles. “With John O’Leary.” *The Catholic Union And Times*. (Buffalo, New York) November 11, 1897; “Bengal Civil Service Retired!” *Homeward Mail From India, China And The East*. (London, England) October 3, 1898. [Instructor in Sanskrit] Yeats, William Butler. *The Collected Letters Of W.B. Yeats: Vol. I. 1865-1895*. Edited by John Kelly and Eric Domville. Clarendon Press. Oxford, England. (1986): 319. [Columbia] “Extension Teaching.” *Columbia University Catalogue*. (1906-1907): 379-382; Columbia University. “Announcement Of Extension Teaching.” *Columbia University Bulletin Of Information*. No. 23. (1907-1908): 12, 22; [University of Wisconsin] Johnston, Charles. “Tutoring Lawmakers.” *Harper’s Weekly*. Vol. LIII, No 2727. (March 27, 1909): 15; Johnston, Charles. “Co-education At Close Range.” *Harper’s Weekly*. Vol. LIII, No. 2739. (June 19, 1909): 797-804; Mitchell, Henry Bedinger. “Charles Johnston.” *The Theosophical Quarterly*. Vol. XXIX, No. 3 (January, 1932): 206-211. [Military Intelligence] “T.S. Activities: Report Of The Annual Convention Of The Theosophical Society.” *The Theosophical Quarterly*. Vol. XVII, No. 1 (June, 1919): 83-111. [Russian Seminary] “Free Public Lectures In Schools.” *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*. (Brooklyn, New York) September 30, 1917. [Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Theosophical Society] Mitchell, Henry Bedinger. “The Late Charles Johnston.” *The New York Times*. (New York, New York):

While studying at Dublin's Erasmus Smith High School in the 1880s, Johnston first met his lifelong friend, William Butler Yeats. Together the two would establish the *Dublin Hermetic Society*, and later, the *Dublin Theosophical Society*.<sup>25</sup> After studying Sanskrit with Robert Atkinson at Trinity College, Dublin, Johnston was admitted into the Bengal Civil Service in 1886. From 1888 until 1890, Johnston was stationed in West Bengal, returning to England after contracting malaria.<sup>26</sup> Back in England, Johnston would write a celebrated Sanskrit grammar and complete his first major work, *From the Upanishads* (1896.) In 1896, at the urging of Griscom, Johnston moved to New York, where he taught one of the first non-University affiliated Sanskrit courses in the United States.<sup>27</sup> As the first President of The Irish Literary Society of New York, Johnston was a driving force behind the Irish Literary Revival and did much to publicize W.B. Yeats in the United States.<sup>28</sup> In 1905 Johnston joined the

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October 21, 1931.

<sup>25</sup> "Notes And News." *The Dublin University Review*. Vol. I. No. 7. (August, 1885): 66; Yeats, William Butler. *Reveries Over Childhood And Youth*. The MacMillan Company. New York, New York. (1916): 107-1909; Guinness, Selina, "Protestant Magic' Reappraised: Evangelicalism, Dissent, and Theosophy." *Irish University Review*. Vol. XXXIII, No. 1, (Spring-Summer, 2003): 14-27.

<sup>26</sup> *The Dublin University Calendar For The Year 1889*, 6; "The Indian Civil Service." *The Daily News*. (London, England) August 22, 1888; "Indian Civil Service." *The Belfast News-Letter*. (Belfast, Ireland) August 25, 1888; "Notes Of The Week." *The Derry Journal*. (Derry, Northern Ireland) November 13, 1931; Greene, David. "Robert Atkinson And Irish Studies." *Hermathena*. No. 102 (Spring, 1966): 6-15.

<sup>27</sup> Johnston, Charles. *Useful Sanskrit Nouns and Verbs*. Luzac & Co. London, England. (1892); Johnston, Charles. *From The Upanishads*. Whaley. Dublin, Ireland. (1896); Johnston, Charles "Reminiscences: Clement Griscom." *The Theosophical Quarterly*. Vol. XVI, No. 4 (April, 1919): 323-326; "Home News." *The New York Tribune*. (New York, New York) November 15, 1896; E.W. "Active New York." *The Theosophical News*. Vol. I., No. 24. (November 30, 1896): 1; "Theosophical News And Work." *The Theosophical Forum*. Vol. II, No. 10. (February, 1897): 153-156.

<sup>28</sup> "Half Hours With Contemporary Irish Authors" *The Catholic Union And Times*. (Buffalo, New York) November 11, 1897; Mulachy, J.B. (Mrs.) "A Pen Portrait Of Mr. Yeats." *The Gael*. Vol. XXII, No. 12. (December, 1903): 425; "Irish Literary Society Starts On Its Career." *The Brooklyn Citizen*. (Brooklyn, New York) May 2, 1903; "To Talk On Ireland's Literary Revival." *The Sun*. (New York, New York) May 29, 1903; Quinn, John. *The Irish Literary Society Of New York Constitution And Officers*. The Irish

faculty at Columbia, as a lecturer of history for the Extension Courses.

In addition to contributing numerous articles and essays to Theosophical journals, Johnston wrote for popular magazines like *The Atlantic*, *Harper's Weekly*, *Cosmopolitan*, using mainstream media to subtly influence public perception of theosophical ideas. In 1899, it was said that: "Johnston [was] doing very good Theosophical work through his articles in the secular magazines. There [was] no better way to reach the public and impregnate the thought of the day with [...] Theosophical philosophy, than to furnish reading which [was] not labeled theosophy."<sup>29</sup> To that end, Johnston wrote a series of essays about meditation and reincarnation which were published as *Memory of Past Births* (1899.) Largely void of overt Theosophical terminology, this work was one of the first books, if not the first, to introduce the terminology "past-life memory," into the popular lexicon.<sup>30</sup> Johnston writes:

Man the personality stands between the two: the animal self below, and the causal, divine self, above...If the divine bears down upon man, and carries him up, from the world of sensation into the world of Life and present immortality, then the psychic body takes on the image of the causal body, and the man consciously rises above death which will be for him not even a break of consciousness but simply the putting aside of an outer body he being meanwhile conscious, and exercising full volition in a psychic body not subject

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Literary Society Of New York. New York, New York. (1903): 1; Johnston, Charles. "Personal Impressions Of W.B. Yeats." *Harper's Weekly*. Vol. XLVIII, No. 2461 (February 20, 1904): 291; Johnston, Charles. "Yeats In The Making." *Poet Lore*. Vol. XVII, No. 2 (Summer, 1906): 102-112; Johnston, Charles. "The Poems Of W. B. Yeats." *The North American Review*. Vol. CLXXXVII, No. 629 (April, 1908): 614-618.

<sup>29</sup> "Reviews." *The Theosophical Forum*. Vol. IV. No. 11. (March, 1899): 14.

<sup>30</sup> Johnston, Charles. "The Memory Of Past Births Pt. I." *Metaphysical Magazine*. Vol. VIII, No. 4 (July-August, 1898): 225-235; Johnston, Charles. "The Memory Of Past Births Pt. II." *Metaphysical Magazine*. Vol. X, No. 1 (July, 1899): 14-24; Johnston, Charles. "The Memory Of Past Births Pt. III." *Metaphysical Magazine*. Vol. X, No. 5 (November, 1899): 270-282; Johnston, Charles. "The Memory Of Past Births Pt. IV." *Metaphysical Magazine*. Vol. X, No. 6 (December, 1899): 351-362; Johnston, Charles. *The Memory Of Past Births*. The Theosophical Society Publishing Department. New York, New York. (1899); Irwin, Lee. *Reincarnation in America: An Esoteric History*. Lexington Books. Lanham, Maryland. (2017): 213.

to space...The causal and immortal self, with which the man has now identified his destiny, is overshadowed by the one Eternal; the infinite Ocean of Life the Sun, after whose shining all else shines; the Soul of souls...Therefore the causal self is the lord of past and future, the guardian of the whole cycle of births. And now we come to our definite answer: the memory of past births is preserved, it is true; but it is preserved only by the causal self. the immortal; and it is only in proportion as we inherit our immortality, and consciously rise above the barriers of time, that we can possibly inherit the memory of our past.<sup>31</sup>

We find “The Author” discussing atemporal consciousness and memory in *Talks* with the following statement:

Our body is an individual collocation of cells, which began to form and grow together at a certain date and will presently be dispersed; but the constructing and dominating reality, called our “soul,” did not then begin to exist; nor will it cease with bodily decay. Interaction with the material world then began, and will then cease, but we ourselves in essence are persistent, if our character be sufficiently developed to possess a reality of its own. In our present state, truly, the memory of our past is imperfect or non-existent; but when we waken and shake off the tenement of matter, rejoining the larger self, of which only a part is now manifested in mortal flesh, our memory and consciousness may enlarge, too, and the continuity become clear.<sup>32</sup>

We find an example of this in *Talks* when “The Author” summarizes R.J. Campbell’s *New Theology* (1907,) in which he states:

The philosophy underlying the *New Theology* may be called a monistic idealism, and monistic idealism recognizes no fundamental distinction between matter and spirit. The fundamental reality is consciousness. The so-called material world is the product of consciousness exercising itself along a certain limited plane; the next stage of consciousness above this is not an absolute break with it, although it is an expansion of experience or

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<sup>31</sup> Johnston, *Memory*, 24-25.

<sup>32</sup> Mitchell, *Talks*, 282.

readjustment of focus.<sup>33</sup>

This statement is repeated verbatim in Johnston's article, "The New Theology in England," in the July, 1907, issue of the *North American Review*:

The philosophy underlying the *New Theology* may be called a monistic idealism, and monistic idealism recognizes no fundamental distinction between matter and spirit. The fundamental reality is consciousness. The so-called material world is the product of consciousness exercising itself along a certain limited plane; the next stage of consciousness above this is not an absolute break with it, although it is an expansion of experience or readjustment of focus.<sup>34</sup>

#### (F.) THE CLERGYMAN

"A Clergyman of the Protestant Episcopal Church."

Percy Stickney Grant (1860-1927.) Director of St. Marks Mission, Fall River, Massachusetts, 1886-1893; rector of Church of the Ascension, New York, New York, 1893-1924.<sup>35</sup>

Grant received his bachelor's and master's degrees from Harvard University and continued with pastoral training at the neighboring Episcopal Theological School. Being one of the first associate members of the *American Society for Psychological Research*, we can assume that he was less than dogmatic regarding the articles of faith.<sup>36</sup> The members of the NYB had a close, though not always amicable,

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 288.

<sup>34</sup> Johnston, Charles. "The New Theology In England." *The North American Review*. Vol. 185, No. 618 (Jul. 5, 1907): 495-504.

<sup>35</sup> "Grant Reviews His 30 Years As Rector." *The New York Times*. (New York, New York) February 2, 1923; Shannon, David A. "A Social Gospel Minister and His Bishop: An Incident in the History of Intellectual Freedom." *New York History*. Vol. XXXVII, No. 1. (January, 1956): 64-79; McFarland, Gerald W. *Inside Greenwich Village: A New York Neighborhood, 1898-1918*. University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, Massachusetts. (2001): 97, 120-146.

<sup>36</sup> Anon. "List of Members and Associates." *Proceedings of the American Society for Psychological Research*. Vol. I., No. 3. (December, 1887): 279-283.

relationship with Grant and the Church of the Ascension.<sup>37</sup> There are several indications that Grant is the “The Clergyman,” but an entry from the diary of Grant’s love interest, Juliet Thompson, provides us with a clear admission. Thompson writes:

Professor [Henry Bedinger] Mitchell, Professor [Dickinson S.] Miller, and Percy Grant belonged about four years ago to a sort of club, where, with other professors of Columbia University they met to discuss religion. Professor Mitchell, whose memory is very accurate, wrote reports of those meetings and published them in book form. The book is extremely interesting. All through it the note is sounded that a great new Light is shining upon the world. “The Mathematician” is Professor Mitchell and “The Clergyman,” is Percy Grant.<sup>38</sup>

(G.) THE EDITOR

“A Member of the Society of Friends by birth and education a Man of Business by  
force of circumstances,  
a Student and Editor of a religious Journal by avocation.”

Clement Acton Griscom, Jr. (1868-1918.)<sup>39</sup> Manager of the Red Star Line, 1888-1901; president of the James Reilly Repair and Supply Company, 1891-1907; manager of the American Division of the International Mercantile Marine, 1901-1904; editor of *The Theosophical Quarterly*, 1903-1918; president of the Griscom-Spencer Company, 1907-1911; co-founder of the Open Door Mission, 1913; president of Griscom-Russell Company, 1913-1919.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Clark, C.C. “The Chapel of the Comforter, Greenwich Village, New York.” Clarence Carroll Clark Papers (MS 393). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

<sup>38</sup> Thompson, Juliet. *The Diary Of Juliet Thompson*. Kalimát Press. Los Angeles, California. (1983): 194-195.

<sup>39</sup> Weeks, Lyman Horace. *Prominent Families of New York*. Historical Company. New York, New York. (1898): 250; “Griscom Funeral Today.” *The New York Times*. (New York, New York) January 1, 1919; “Local Plant’s Head Dies In New York.” *The Evening Independent*. (Massillon, Ohio), January 2, 1919; Mitchell, Henry Bedinger. “A Stone of the Foundation.” *The Theosophical Quarterly*. Vol. XVII, No. 1 (July, 1919): 9-21.

<sup>40</sup> “A Twofold Company.” *The American Marine Engineer*. Vol. I, No. 2 (December, 1906): 6-7; “Dinner to Mr. C.A. Griscom.” *The American Marine Engineer*. Vol. VIII, No. 2 (February, 1913): 29-30; Flayhart, William H. *The American Line: 1871-1902*.



Griscom was among the “Philadelphia Aristocracy” of the turn of the century. The son of C.A. Griscom, Sr., and Frances Canby Biddle Griscom, his maternal and paternal lines played important roles in Pennsylvania history for over two centuries; “the flag maker,” Betsy Ross, was among his notable ancestors.<sup>41</sup> A Hicksite Quaker by birth, Griscom received his early education at the Friends’ School on Fifteenth & Race Street in Philadelphia.<sup>42</sup> A graduate of the University of Pennsylvania, Griscom, like his father, entered the business world immediately upon graduation.<sup>43</sup> While still attending university, Griscom joined the Theosophical Society, but wary of unwanted attention being directed at his father, who carried the same name, Griscom did not actively promote his association with the organization in public.<sup>44</sup> Griscom was directly involved with many corporate operations over the years, and during the period of *Talks*, he entered a business deal with fellow Theosophist, Alexander H. Spencer, which saw the James Reilly Repair and Supply Co. reorganized as The Griscom-Spencer Company.<sup>45</sup>

In November 1902, the Griscoms bought a home at 21 Washington Square North and joined Grant’s nearby Church of the Ascension.<sup>46</sup> This coincided with a

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Norton. New York, New York. (2000): 350.

<sup>41</sup> “The Modern Flag Maker.” *Munsey’s Magazine*. XXVIII, No. 3 December, 1902): 395-98; “Our Trip East.” *The McPherson Freeman*. (McPherson, Kansas): August 06, 1897.

<sup>42</sup> Griscom, Lloyd C. *Diplomatically Speaking*. The Literary Guild Of America. New York, New York. (1940): 4-8; Griscom, Jr., C.A. “Quakerism And Theosophy.” *The Theosophical Quarterly*. Vol. II, No. 4 (April, 1905): 157-162; Mitchell, Henry Bedinger. “A Stone of the Foundation.” *The Theosophical Quarterly*. Vol. XVII, No. 1 (July, 1919): 9-21.

<sup>43</sup> University of Pennsylvania Class of 1887. *Five and Thirty: The Further History of the Class of Eighty-Seven of the University of Pennsylvania*. Private printing. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. (1922): 138-140.

<sup>44</sup> Theosophical Society General Membership Register, 1875-1942 at <http://tsmembers.org/>. See Book 1, entry 3924. (website file: 1B:1885-1890) Clement Acton Griscom, Jr; Mitchell, Henry Bedinger. “A Stone of the Foundation.” *The Theosophical Quarterly*. Vol. XVII, No. 1 (July, 1919): 9-21.

<sup>45</sup> Theosophical Society General Membership Register, 1875-1942 at <http://tsmembers.org/>. See Book 1, entry 4580. (website file: 1B:1885-1890) Alexander H. Spencer.

<sup>46</sup> “C.A. Griscom, Jr., Buys A House.” *The New York Tribune*. (New York, New York)

time period during which a concerted effort was made to rejuvenate the external efforts of the GTS. To that end, in 1903 Griscom financed, edited, and published the journal, *The Theosophical Quarterly*, as the literary organ of the GTS, which resembled in character and format *The Hibbert Journal*.<sup>47</sup> In outlining the objects of the Society, Griscom printed the following “blurb” on the back cover:

The Society does not pretend to be able to establish at once a universal brotherhood among men, but only strives to create the nucleus of such a body. Many of its members believe that an acquaintance with the world’s religions and philosophies will reveal, as the common and fundamental principle underlying these, that “spiritual identity of all Souls with the Oversoul” which is the basis of true brotherhood; and many of them also believe that an appreciation of the finer forces of nature and man will still further emphasize the same idea.<sup>48</sup>

Mitchell, in recalling the period in which Griscom began the *Quarterly*, writes: [Griscom] had no experience as editor or author, but with the simple and bold directness that characterized all his decisions—and which found expression in his maxim, “The only way to do anything, from running steamships to stopping smoking, is to do it.”—he set himself to the production of a magazine...In July, 1903, he started *The Theosophical Quarterly*...The magazine proved a great success from the start. With his Quaker gift of “speaking to the condition” of his hearers, Mr. Griscom addressed no imaginary audience, but wrote and conducted the magazine directly for the needs of the Society’s members.<sup>49</sup>

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November 27, 1902; Grant, Percy Stickney. Percy Stickney Grant to Bishop David H. Greer. New York, New York. October 25, 1911. “Acton Griscom: Postulant Clergy File.” *Diocesan Archives of the Episcopal Church of New York*.

<sup>47</sup> “T.S. Activities.” *The Theosophical Quarterly*. Vol. XIII, No. 1. (July, 1915): 88-112.

<sup>48</sup> “The Theosophical Society In America.” *The Theosophical Quarterly*. Vol. I, No. 1 (July, 1903): back cover.

<sup>49</sup> Mitchell, Henry Bedinger. “A Stone of the Foundation.” *The Theosophical Quarterly*. Vol. XVII, No. 1 (July, 1919): 9-21.

(H.) THE BIOLOGIST  
 “A Professor of Biology.”

Gary Nathan Calkins (1869-1943.) [Professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1890-1906; professor at Columbia University, 1906-1939.]

Calkins was a pioneer in the study of single-cell life forms, who defined several new species, and made extensive contributions to the taxonomy of amoebae and ciliates.<sup>50</sup> His work, *The Protozoa* (1901,) was the first English-language book published on the subject. As a biologist at the New York State Cancer Laboratory, Calkins investigated the possible role unicellular life played in the development of cancer cells.<sup>51</sup> In the serialized *Talks*, found in the *Theosophical Quarterly*, the “The Mathematician” prefaces their February meeting with the following statement:

I have small hope of seeing our Biologist. For, though he promised to come if he could, I know he is presenting a paper before the Society for Experimental Biology. As he deals with no less a subject than the discovery of the cancer germ, there is little chance of his being let off in time to join us.<sup>52</sup>

On February 3, 1907, *The New York Times* ran an article that included a lengthy interview with Calkins titled: “The Cause of Cancer Probably Discovered; Its Cure Possible.” Public interest was renewed in John Beard’s embryological theory of cancer, and the research Calkins was conducting.<sup>53</sup> Consistent with “The Mathematician’s” statement regarding “The Biologist,” we find that on February 20, 1907, Calkins was presenting his paper, “Spirochæta Microgyrata Löw and Mouse Tumors,” before The Society For Experimental Biology at the Rockefeller Institute in New York City.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Jacobs, Natasha X. “Unit to Unity: Protozoology, Cell Theory, and the New Concept of Life.” *Journal of the History of Biology*. Vol. XXII, No. 2. (Summer, 1989): 215-242.

<sup>51</sup> “Gary Calkins.” *The National Academy of Sciences*. <https://www.nasonline.org/member-directory/deceased-members/20001060.html>. January 21, 2022.

<sup>52</sup> Mitchell, Henry Bedinger. “Talks On Religion V.” *The Theosophical Quarterly*. Vol. V., No. 3. (January, 1908): 259-272.

<sup>53</sup> “The Cause Of Cancer Probably Discovered; Its Cure Possible.” *The New York Times*. (New York, New York) February 3, 1907; “The Two Theories Of Cancer Origin.” *The New York Times*. (New York, New York) February 18, 1907.

<sup>54</sup> Calkins, Gary N. “A Spirochete in Mouse Cancer, Spirochaeta Microgyrata

Another clue along these lines can be found in the penultimate chapter of *Talks*, when “The Mathematician,” states: “The late spring had finally passed into summer, and with the coming of warmer weather the annual exodus from the city had begun...The Biologist was presiding at a medical conference in a distant city.”<sup>55</sup> On May 22, 1907, Calkins was presiding over the Twenty-third meeting of the Society For Experimental Biology and Medicine.<sup>56</sup>

(I.) THE SOCIAL PHILOSOPHER

“A Professor of Philosophy much interested in Socialism.”

William Pepperell Montague (1873-1953.) [Professor of philosophy at the University of California Berkeley, 1899-1903; Professor at Columbia University, 1903-1947.]

Montague was a philosopher full of idiosyncrasies who “hated only meanness, dishonesty, injustice, and cruelty.”<sup>57</sup> The appellation of “Social Philosopher,” which Mitchell uses, is a euphemistic placeholder for Montague’s brand of Socialism. Writing in 1954, the philosopher, Irwin Edman, remarks on Montague’s relationship with Socialism:

In those days that now seem relatively relaxed and innocent politically, some of Montague’s ideas seemed to some summer-session students quite daring: old-fashioned Norman Thomas socialism, birth control, companionate marriage, along with firmly stated arguments in support of simple, old-fashioned civil liberties. There were intriguing references to guild socialism and syndicalism and soundnesses pointed out in anarchism, which term at the time had the sinister overtones of Communism today. There were suggestions that came with the freshness of surprise and almost of fantasy, that marriages ought to be very early because early marriages were healthy and normal and

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(Löwenthal) Var. Gaylordi.” *The Journal Of Infectious Diseases*. Vol. IV, No. 2. (April 10, 1907): 171-174; “Executive Proceedings.” *Proceedings of the Society for Experimental Biology and Medicine: (1906-1907)*. Vol. IV. (August 1, 1907): 175-177.

<sup>55</sup> Mitchell, *Talks*, 262.

<sup>56</sup> “Special Articles: Society For Experimental Biology Medicine.” *American Medicine*. Vol. II, No. 5. (May, 1907): 319-322.

<sup>57</sup> Perry, Ralph Barton. “William Pepperell Montague and the New Realists.” *The Journal of Philosophy*. Vol. LI, No. 21 (October 14, 1954): 604–608.

if mistakes in choice were made, they would be even worse later. I am uncertain whether I was more impressed by Montague's fairness or his receptivity, his inspiring moral as well as intellectual curiosities and tolerances, his philosophical interest in the dialectic of any social idea, following it out ingeniously wherever the argument led.<sup>58</sup>

From October 1906, until it burned down in March, 1907, Montague and his family lived at the Helicon Home Colony, Upton Sinclair's experimental Socialist community in New Jersey.<sup>59</sup> In his autobiography, Sinclair writes:

Montague came to us innocent of social theories and even knowledge. But presently he found himself backed up against our four-sided fireplace, assailed by ferocious bands of socialists, anarchists, syndicalists, and single taxers. We could not discover that we made any dent in his armor; but presently came rumors that in the Faculty Club of Columbia, where he ate his lunch, he was being denounced as a "red" and finding himself backed up against the wall by ferocious bands of Republicans, Democrats, and Goo-goos (members of the Good Government League. Of course the palest pink in Helicon Hall would have seemed flaming red in Columbia...In the evenings there were visitors, interesting persons from many parts of the world. John Dewey came occasionally, as the guest of Montague...Another guest was William James who was perhaps the greatest of American psychologists.<sup>60</sup>

It would seem that Montague's introduction to Socialism occurred at Helicon, during a time period overlapping with the *Talks*, which occurred from October 1906 until May 1907.

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<sup>58</sup> Edman, Irwin. "William Pepperell Montague: A Memoir." *The Journal of Philosophy* Vol. LI, No. 21 (October 14, 1954): 615-619.

<sup>59</sup> Kaplan, Lawrence. "A Utopia During The Progressive Era: The Helicon Home Colony 1906-1907." *American Studies*. Vol. XXV, No. 2. (Fall, 1984): 59-73.

<sup>60</sup> Sinclair, Upton. *The Autobiography of Upton Sinclair*. Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc. New York, New York. (1962): 131-133.

## (J.) THE BANKER

“A Banker and Man of Business, formerly an officer in the United States Army.”

John Fulton Berrien Mitchell (1878-1956.) Lieutenant in the United States Army, 1898-1901; banker at Redmond Kerr & Co, 1902 (made partner in 1909); Director of Griscom-Russell Company, 1919. Partner in Wood, Low & Co., 1926; Director of the Investors Management Company, 1954.<sup>61</sup>

Brother of Henry Bedinger Mitchell, and an alumnus of Columbia University. After graduating from Columbia University in 1898, J.F.B. Mitchell enlisted in the army and served in the Philippines during the Spanish-American War. After leaving the military in 1901 J.F.B. Mitchell joined the banking firm of Redmond, Kerr & Co. in 1902. Shortly before his death in 1956, J.F.B. Mitchell met with religious scholar Kenneth Morgan to enlist his aid in acting as a liaison between Harvard University and the GTS for a project that would ultimately result in the Harvard University's Center for the Study of World Religions.<sup>62</sup>

## (K.) THE PRAGMATIST

“A Professor of Philosophy and one of the foremost exponents of Individualism and Pragmatism.”

John Dewey (1859-1952.) [Professor at the University of Michigan, 1884-1894. President of the American Psychological Association, 1899; professor at the University of Chicago, 1894-1904; president of the American Philosophical Association, 1905; professor at Columbia University, 1904-1930.<sup>63</sup>

Following the publication of *Studies in Logical Theory* (1904,) Dewey accepted a faculty position at Columbia University. During the course of many discussions with his colleagues, F.J.E. Woodbridge and William Pepperell Montague, Dewey was

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<sup>61</sup> Bond, *Monograph on the Southgate Family*, 47; Leonard, John William. *Who's Who in Finance and Banking: 1920-22*. Who's Who In Finance, Inc. Brooklyn, New York. (1922): 476; “John F. Mitchell, Stockbroker, 78; Partner in Wood, Walker & Co. Dies—Urged War, Debt Cancellation in 1929.” *The New York Times*. (New York, New York) February 15, 1956.

<sup>62</sup> Morgan, Kenneth W. *Memories*. Unpublished. 257-277; Morgan, Kenneth W. “The Establishment of the Center.” *CSWR Bulletin*. (Summer, 1977): 2-14.

<sup>63</sup> “The Fourth Meeting of the American Philosophical Association.” *The Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods*. Vol. II, No. 2. (January 19, 1905): 41-55.

presented with a challenge to fine-tune his theory of instrumental logic, and his conception of experience. Woodbridge, in particular, would deeply influence Dewey's thoughts on Metaphysics.<sup>64</sup>

In December 1905, coinciding with the dedication of Emerson Hall, Harvard University hosted the joint convention of the American Philosophical Association, and the American Psychological Association.<sup>65</sup> Dewey, in his Presidential Address, "Beliefs and Realities," stated:

We cannot keep connection on one side and throw it away upon the other. We cannot preserve significance and decline the personal attitude in which it is inscribed and operative, any more than we can get anything but vanity by making things "states" of a consciousness whose reality is to be an interpretation of things. Beliefs are personal affairs, and personal affairs are adventures, and adventures are, if you please, shady.<sup>66</sup>

We find a statement attributed to "The Pragmatist" in *Talks*:

Religion must always be individual, always based upon personal experience and personal temperament and character...Religion is to me an adventure of faith; an act of the will. One chooses to believe in a power for good. One is not compelled by external things to such a belief; but by one's own will one chooses that attitude toward life...Religion is not a matter of evidence, but of

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<sup>64</sup> Dewey, John. *The Middle Works, 1899-1924*. Southern Illinois University Press. Carbondale, Illinois. (1976): xii; Shook, John R. "John Dewey's Struggle with American Realism, 1904-1910." *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*. Vol. XXXI, No. 3 (Summer, 1995): 542-566; McClelland, Ken. "John Dewey and Richard Rorty: Qualitative Starting Points." *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*. Vol. XLIV, No. 3 (Summer, 2008): 412-245.

<sup>65</sup> Smiley, Ralph. "Emerson Hall And Its Dedication." *The Harvard Illustrated Magazine*. Vol. VII, No. 4. (January, 1906): 67-72; "Emerson Hall Opened." *The Harvard Crimson*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts) January 3, 1906.

<sup>66</sup> "The Fifth Meeting of the American Philosophical Association." *The Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods*. Vol. III, No. 3. (February 1, 1906): 70-77; Dewey, John. "Beliefs And Realities." *The Philosophical Review*. Vol. XV., No. 2. (March, 1906): 113-129.

the will. It is an adventure of faith.<sup>67</sup>

More evidence that “The Pragmatist” is Dewey can be found when comparing the essays and books which Dewey published around the time period to statements made in *Talks*. In “Reality as Experience,” published in the spring of 1906, Dewey writes:

The reason the scientist can suppress in his statement of the reality factors which the reality possesses, is just because (1) he is not interested in the total reality, but in such phases of it as serve as trustworthy indications of imports and projects, and because (2) the elements suppressed are not totally suppressed, but are right there in his experience: in its extra-scientific features. In other words, the scientist can ignore some part of the man’s experience, just because that part is so irremediably there in experience.<sup>68</sup>

This theme is echoed by “The Pragmatist,” who states:

Religion will never be “merely” anything to the religious man, neither “merely” ideals nor “merely” anything else. Yet the more strongly we feel an ideal, the more careless we may be of other evidences. To need other reality than this, is practically a reflection upon our own feeling.<sup>69</sup>

In “The Control of Ideas by Facts,” published in the month following the above discussion concerning “The Pragmatist,” Dewey writes:

Supposing the individual stands still and attempts to compare his idea with the reality, with what reality is he to compare it? Not with the presented reality, for that reality is the reality of himself lost; not with the complete reality, for that at this stage of proceedings is the idea itself. What kind of comparison is possible or desirable then, save to treat the mental layout of the whole situation as a working hypothesis, as a plan of action, and proceed to act upon it, to use it as a director and controller of one's divagations instead of

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<sup>67</sup> Mitchell, *Talks*, 214.

<sup>68</sup> Dewey, John. “Reality as Experience.” *The Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods*. Vol. III, No. 10. (May 10, 1906): 253-257.

<sup>69</sup> Mitchell, *Talks*, 209-210.



stumbling blindly around until one is either exhausted or accidentally gets out?<sup>70</sup>

In “Religion and Our Schools,” published in *The Hibbert Journal* in 1908, Dewey states:

In no other way is it easy to account for the attitude of those who are convinced of the final departure of the supernatural interpretation of the world and of man, and who yet think that agencies like the church and the school must not be thoroughly reconstructed before they can be fit organs for nurturing types of religious feeling and thought which are consistent with modern democracy and modern science.<sup>71</sup>

We find a candid expression of this idea articulated by “The Pragmatist” who states:

As for the betterment of social and civic conditions, the betterment of man himself, I think the crux of the matter is in James’s proposed last chapter.<sup>72</sup> I believe it is to be sought through the emancipation of science. Our tenements are better than they were, not because of religion, but because of sanitary science—and the same is and will be true in the betterment of other social evils.<sup>73</sup>

The words of “The Pragmatist,” in many ways, read like a preamble to *Ethics* (1908,) which Dewey co-authored with James Tufts. In describing the evolution of organized religion, “The Pragmatist,” states:

The first stage presents the primitive, tribal gods. In this, religion is not individual but communal. The correlate to which is that religion is without

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<sup>70</sup> Dewey, John. “The Control of Ideas by Facts.” *The Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods*. Vol. IV, No. 8. (April 11, 1907): 197-203.

<sup>71</sup> Dewey, John. “Religion And Our Schools.” *The Hibbert Journal*. Vol. VI., No. 4. (July. 1908): 796-809.

<sup>72</sup> See: James, William. *Pragmatism: A New Name For Some Old Ways Of Thinking*. Longmans, Green, And Co. London, England. (1907): 273-301.

<sup>73</sup> Mitchell, *Talks*, 213.

particular significance to the individual, concerning, in fact, only those portions of his life where his welfare is bound up with the welfare of his tribe. The god is the god of the tribe, treating the tribe as a unit and worshiped by the tribe as a unit. The sacrifices are propitiatory for the entire community, not at all individual, or expressive of an individual relation. Whatever relation exists between you and any particular deity exists because you are a member of a particular tribe which has either pleased or offended the deity in question. In the record leading us from primitive Judaism to early Christianity we see the transition from this first stage to the second. One God has been chosen from many, and that one has become supreme. But there remains the old tribal idea, that your relation to the Deity depends upon your membership in this or that body. With the Jews it was a racial matter; the whole Hebrew people were the chosen of God. With the early Christians, and perpetuated in Catholicism, it was a matter of membership in the organized Church...The most significant and essential thing in the Protestant movement, again speaking not as a historian, but as a dialectician, was the raising of its concept of God to universality. God was no longer the God of the Church alone, or even of Christendom, or of man, or of the whole world; but was actually cosmic and universal and absolute.<sup>74</sup>

When compared with similar statements made in *Ethics*, the resemblance is clear. Dewey writes:

There are in the first place the activities induced by the great primitive needs and instincts...At this point the conception of the group welfare as bound up with the acts of every member, comes in to make individual conformity a matter for group concern—to make conduct a matter of mores and not merely a private affair. One most important, if not the most important, object of early legislation was the enforcement of lucky rites to prevent the individual from doing what might bring ill luck on all the tribe.<sup>75</sup> [...] The Covenant relation was a moral conception. The usual religious conception is that of some blood or kin relation between people and deity...To conceive of the relation between god and people as due to voluntary choice, is to introduce a powerful agency

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 222-223.

<sup>75</sup> Dewey, John; Tufts, James H. *Ethics*. Henry Holt And Company. New York, New York. (1908): 52-53.

toward making morality conscious. Whatever the origin of the idea, the significant fact is that the religious and moral leaders present the relation of Israel to Jehovah as based on a covenant. On the one hand, Jehovah protects, preserves, and prospers; on the other, Israel is to obey his laws and serve no other gods.<sup>76</sup> [...] The significance of early Christianity as a moral movement, aside from its elements of personal devotion and social unity to be noticed below was the spirit of movement the sense of newly forming horizons beyond the old the conviction that as sons of God its followers had boundless possibilities that they were not the children of the bond woman but of the free...At first national, it became universal, and with a fraternity which the world is far from having realized, it was to know neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free.<sup>77</sup> [...] And the universality of religion is no less a gain. So far as religion was of the group it tended to emphasize the boundary between Jew and Gentile, Greek and Barbarian, between the “we group” and the “others” group. But when this group religion gave place to a more universal religion, the kingdom of Israel could give place to the kingdom of God, brotherhood could transcend family or national lines.<sup>78</sup>

(L.) THE ANTHROPOLOGIST  
“A Professor of Anthropology.”

Livingston Farrand. (1867-1939.) Adjunct Professor of Psychology at Columbia, 1893-1903; professor of Anthropology at Columbia, 1903-1914; executive secretary of the National Association for the Study and Prevention of Tuberculosis, 1905-1914; president of the University of Colorado, 1914-1919; president of Cornell University, 1921-1937.]<sup>79</sup>

While an adjunct professor of psychology at Columbia University, Farrand accompanied Franz Boas on the Jesup North Pacific Expedition (1897-1902,) where

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid. 94-95.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid. 108-109.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid. 196.

<sup>79</sup> Parran, Thomas. “Obituary: Livingston Farrand.” *Science*. Vol. XC, No. 2347. (December 22, 1939): 583-584; Miller, James Alexander. “Obituary: Livingston Farrand, 1867-1939.” *American Review of Tuberculosis*. Vol. XLI. (January-June, 1940): 272-275.

he documented the traditions of the Alsea, Salish, Chilcotin, Quinault, and others.<sup>80</sup> When Farrand returned to Columbia, he switched departments, becoming a full professor of anthropology in 1903. In 1904 Farrand published, *Basis of American History: 1500-1900*. This provides context for the question “The Mathematician” puts to “The Anthropologist” in *Talks*:

The Mathematician: Has not Manitouism recently been proposed for the designation of the belief in a higher power than man himself, or for the simplest form of religious belief?

The Anthropologist: Manitouism has been suggested, but it is in fact by no means a crude or primitive form of belief. It is a very complete system. “Belief in spirits” has been used to denote the early expression of religion, but very likely that also is not the beginning.<sup>81</sup>

In *Basis of American History* Farrand writes:

To the mind of the Indian anything which was strange was “mystery,” and to “mystery” was referred in all the languages, everything incomprehensible. This is the meaning of the word “manitou,” of Algonquian origin, now so widely used for corresponding conceptions throughout the tribes of the continent. Primarily an adjective, it has come to be employed as a noun, and spirits are called “manitous” as personifications of this quality. As a matter of course, some of these spirits are more powerful than others, and there are, therefore, grades of manitous, and sometimes one in particular, who will be venerated or feared more than any other. There is not, however, any conception of an all powerful deity or “great spirit.” It was the misapprehension of the character of the manitou by the early missionaries and

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<sup>80</sup> Anon. “The Jesup Expedition to the North Pacific Coast.” *Science*. Vol. VI, No. 145. (October 8, 1897): 535-538; Boaz, Franz (ed.) *The Jesup North Pacific Expedition: Memoir of the American Museum of Natural History New York Vol. II*. Knickerbocker Press. New York, New York. (1900): 1-54; 77-132; Farrand, Livingston. “Notes on the Alsea Indians of Oregon.” *American Anthropologist*. Vol. III, No. 2 (April-June, 1901): 239-247; Boas, Franz (ed.) *Folk-tales of Salishan and Sahaptin Tribes*. The American Folklore Society. G.E. Stechert & Co. New York, New York. (1917): xi.

<sup>81</sup> Mitchell, *Talks*, 23.

observers, and their tendency to read their own ideas into the Indian religions, that gave rise to the error. The particular manitou which would hold the first place in any given group was naturally determined by the general mode of life. Among the plains Indians the spirit of the buffalo was the one to be considered above all others; while among other tribes the sun rain spirits of various crops etc were the powers to be propitiated.<sup>82</sup>

(M.) THE OXONIAN

“A Professor of Philosophy much interested in Psychology and an earnest Churchman.”

Dickinson Sergeant Miller. (1868-1963.) Deacon in Episcopal Church; associate professor of philosophy at Bryn Mawr, 1894; instructor of philosophy at Harvard, 1899-1904; professor of philosophy at Columbia University, 1904-1919; professor of Christian apologetics at the General Theological Seminary, 1911-1924; professor of philosophy at Smith College, 1924-1926.<sup>83</sup>

In 1890 Miller began his master's at Harvard University where he studied under Josiah Royce, George Santayana, and William James, with whom he developed a close friendship. Known for his works on “metaphysics” and “philosophy of the mind,” Miller received his Ph.D. from the University of Halle in 1893. His career at Columbia University began in 1904 as a lecturer, in 1907, at the same time “The Oxonian” makes an appearance *Talks*, Miller was promoted to professorship, and assigned a seat in the faculty.<sup>84</sup> As previously mentioned, Juliet Thompson states that “Professor Miller, and Percy Grant belonged...to a sort of club, where, with other professors of Columbia University they met to discuss religion.”<sup>85</sup> Clues that Miller is “The Oxonian” can be found by comparing his 1908 Lenten sermon, “The Presence of

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<sup>82</sup> Farrand, Livingston. *Basis of American History: 1500-1900*. Harper & Brothers Publishers. New York, New York. (1904): 249-250.

<sup>83</sup> Easton, Lloyd D., “Introduction.” Chapter in *Philosophical Analysis and Human Welfare: Selected Essays and Chapters from Six Decades*. D. Reidel Publishing Company. Dordrecht, Netherlands. (1975): 1-36.

<sup>84</sup> “Trustees Meeting.” *The Columbia Spectator*. (New York, New York) February 6, 1907; “Trustees Meeting.” *The Columbia Spectator*. (New York, New York) March 5, 1907.

<sup>85</sup> Thompson, Juliet. *The Diary Of Juliet Thompson*. Kalimát Press. Los Angeles, California. (1983): 194-195.

the Holy Spirit,” delivered at Grant’s *Church of the Ascension in 1908*, with those attributed to “The Oxonian” in the Talks. In “The Presence of the Holy Spirit,” Miller states:

I have had enough of the philosophical intellect's issue of an injunction against all religious experience until the long hearings in its litigation are over; like a court of chancery wearing out the life of natural heirs before it duly divides and delivers to them their property. The answer to all courteous indifference and all dilatory philosophy is, God the Holy Spirit is met in prayer. Turn to the Most High within you, turn to the blessed inward experience, worship it, open to it, and make it prevail.<sup>86</sup>

We find “The Oxonian” articulating of a similar conception of the Holy Spirit:

In ourselves these tendencies are not wholly to be identified with our own deliberate will. The doctrine of the Holy Spirit approves itself as essentially true in experience. There is a power not ourselves within ourselves, what St. Paul calls “the power that worketh in us.” We can only invite its presence, assume toward it a receptive attitude, welcome it when it comes. This is essentially the attitude of prayer.<sup>87</sup>

(N.) THE LOGICIAN.

“The Logician: An Instructor of Logic.”

Harold Chapman Brown (1879-1943.) Instructor in philosophy at Columbia from 1905-1913; professor of philosophy at Stanford University from 1913-1943; president of the Pacific Division of the American Philosophical Association in the years 1924-1925, and 1932-1933.<sup>88</sup>

In 1905 Brown received his Ph.D from Harvard University. In 1906 he accepted the positions of Instructor and Assistant in Philosophy at Columbia University, and in February, 1907, a month after the singular appearance of the

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<sup>86</sup> Miller, Dickinson S. “The Presence of the Holy Spirit.” *The Theosophical Quarterly*. Vol. VI, No. 1 (June, 1908): 46-49.

<sup>87</sup> Mitchell, *Talks*, 110-111.

<sup>88</sup> Shook, John R. (ed.) *Dictionary of Modern American Philosophers*. Thoemmes. Bristol, England. (2005): 355.

“Logician” in *Talks*, Brown was promoted to the position of Tutor.<sup>89</sup> Brown, a self-identified logician as early as 1906, wrote extensively on that branch of philosophy, which he articulated fully in his 1919 work, “The Definition of Logic.”<sup>90</sup> His essay, “A Logician in the Field of Psychology,” written the year of his death, would be his final contribution to philosophy.<sup>91</sup> Following William James’s Pragmatism Lectures at Columbia, Brown contributed, “Mathematics And Philosophy,” to *Essays, Philosophical and Psychological* (1908,) in which he writes:

Deductive procedure, whether rightly or wrongly, always has a tendency to claim infallibility, and only the deductive aspect of logistic has been clearly recognized even by logicians. This turns out to be a neglect of facts...A similar error leads to the reproach that logistic is fruitless in its results, for it hampers rather than aids creative mathematical imagination. But even if it were so, the function of logistic, if limited to critical reconstruction, would be a highly important one. Even Poincaré, its opponent, distinguishes two types of mathematical mind, the “intuitional” and the “logical,” both of which are equally necessary to science, although the former are usually the discoverers, and the latter the critical perfectors of the more or less imperfect contributions of the “intuitionalists.” Logistic, then, is not fruitless, unless it be taken as aiming at more than it intends, at more than critical reconstruction. It is the

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<sup>89</sup> “The Graduate School of Arts and Sciences.” *Official Register of Harvard University*. Vol. III, No. 4 (January 30, 1906): 136-168; “New Columbia Professors.” *The New York Times*. (New York, New York) February 5, 1907; Columbia University. *Columbia University Bulletin Of Information: Extension Teaching Announcement 1912-1913*. Columbia University; New York, New York. Twelfth Series. No. 19. (May 25, 1912): v; Brown, Harold Chapman. “A Philosophic Mind In The Making.” Essay in *Contemporary American Philosophy Vol. I*, edited by George P. Adams and William Pepperell Montague. The MacMillan Company. New York, New York (1930): 169-195.

<sup>90</sup> Brown, Harold Chapman. “Review: Sur La Compatibilité Des Axiomes De l’Arithmétique.” *The Journal Of Philosophy Psychology And Scientific Methods*. Vol. III, No. 19. (September 13, 1906): 530; Brown, Harold Chapman. “The Definition Of Logic.” *The Journal Of Philosophy Psychology And Scientific Methods*. Vol. XVI, No. 20. (September 25, 1919): 533-541.

<sup>91</sup> Schliff, Paul Arthur (ed.) *The Philosophy of Bertrand Russell*. The Library of Living Philosophers, Inc. Evanston, Illinois. (1946): xiv; 447-473.

problem of the “logical” type of mind. The chief objection, however, from a philosophic point of view is that logicians define the simple by the complex, that they neglect the clear and undoubtable for very complex and badly understood notions which they laboriously and artificially express in an arbitrary finite number of unwieldy postulates. This charge at first seems to be justified, but it neglects to consider what is the real meaning of simplicity, a very difficult notion, and when we come to consider it, in connection with the logical problem of mathematical morphology, it will appear that the logician is true to his own purpose and does attain simplicity despite his apparent complexity.<sup>92</sup>

### (O.) THE YOUTH

“An Assistant in Philosophy.”

Max Forrester Eastman (1883-1969.) Assistant in philosophy at Columbia University from 1907-1911; editor of the Socialist magazine, *The Masses*, from 1912-1917; co-founder of *The Liberator*, in 1918.<sup>93</sup>

In February 1907, Eastman began work on his Ph.D. in philosophy at Columbia University under the tutelage of John Dewey, Dickinson S. Miller, and F.J.E. Woodbridge.<sup>94</sup> When Harold Chapman Brown was promoted to Tutor, Eastman took over as Assistant in Philosophy.<sup>95</sup> The arrival of Eastman at Columbia coincides with the first appearance of “The Youth” in chapter six of *Talks*, which takes place in March, 1907. Writing of this time, Eastman states:

[Miller’s] health was poor, and the doctor had prescribed fresh air and mild exercise. He had decided to take these strange medicines in a canoe on the Hudson River, and to make them more palatable, he conceived the idea of having me in the business end of the canoe and mixing them with intellectual conversation. As nothing could have better fitted my own hygienic

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Irmischer, Christoph. *Max Eastman: A Life*. Yale University Press. New Haven Connecticut. (2017): 94; 132.

<sup>94</sup> Eastman, Max. *Enjoyment Of Living*. Harper & Brothers. New York, New York (1948): 283.

<sup>95</sup> “New Columbia Professors.” *The New York Times*. (New York, New York) February 5, 1907.



requirements, and as those conversations amounted to a complete course in the history of human thought, he might well have charged me a good round fee as my tutor. Instead, he paid me thirty dollars a month as his gondolier. We would meet at a precise hour and walk briskly down to the foot of 110th Street, where the canoe lived in an old wave-slapped, slubbed wooden boathouse, impossible to conceive there now. Miller, impeccably clad for the sport, would climb into the boat with exquisite care and sit down facing me, bolt upright, balancing himself dexterously, yet as out of his element as a pope on a roller coaster.<sup>96</sup>

We find textual evidence in support of Eastman being “The Youth” in chapter seven of *Talks*, when “The Mathematician” states:

A message was received from the Oxonian saying that he also would be unable to attend. It developed later that he and the Youth had gone canoeing together and had been prevented by head winds and tide from making their home port in time.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Eastman, *Enjoyment*, 269-270.

<sup>97</sup> Mitchell, *Talks*, 262.

## PART II. TIMELINE.

### THE NATURE OF THE INQUIRY.

OCTOBER 24, 1906.

Dewey dined with Montague on October 19 and October 21, and went to Englewood, New Jersey (Helicon Home Colony,) on October 23, presumably with Montague (See Montague's bio.)<sup>98</sup> On October 20, 1906, Percy Grant was called to Brookline, Massachusetts, by the sudden death of his father, Stephen M. Grant, a prominent merchant of Boston. He remained there until after the funeral on October 22.<sup>99</sup> The first *Talk*, therefore, likely occurred on October 24, 1906.

### CHRISTIANITY AND NATURE.

NOVEMBER 21, 1906.

We know that the second meeting occurred a month after the first meeting, as Mitchell writes: "The month had passed, and the Mathematician's friends were again gathered in his rooms."<sup>100</sup> We can narrow the date down further by examining a statement made by "The Clergyman," who states:

I am aware that upon this question of authority there are wide differences among my colleagues. My Bishop, for example, told us this week that every member of the clergy should have a definite theological system well grounded in the history of the Church, though, I believe, he did not extend this requirement to the laity. But I would like it clearly understood that for myself I cannot pretend to present here an authoritative teaching, but can only give you my own views—what religion means to me.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Levine, Barbara. "Chronology Of John Dewey's Life and Work." *The Center for John Dewey Studies*. Southern Illinois University Carbondale. (2016.)

<sup>99</sup> "S.M. Grant." *The Fall River Daily Evening News*. (Fall River, Massachusetts) October 22, 1906; "The Church at Work." *The Living Church*. Vol. XXXVI, No. 1 (November 3, 1906): 26-34.

<sup>100</sup> Mitchell, *Talks*, 32.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

This remark is likely a reference to statements made by Henry Codman Potter, Bishop of the Episcopal Church in New York, at the Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church of the Diocese of New York on November 14, 1906.<sup>102</sup> Potter said: “A minister who found himself unable to longer teach the essential doctrines of the church should retire from the priesthood.”<sup>103</sup> This remark was an allusion to the much-discussed Algernon Crapsey, former rector of St. Andrew's Episcopal Church in Rochester, New York, who was tried by the Episcopal Church the previous spring on charges of heresy.<sup>104</sup> If this is correct, then this discussion would have occurred within the week of November 14–November 20, 1906. On November 19, 1906, Grant assisted Bishop Potter with the funeral of S. Nicholson Kane, Commodore of New York Yacht Club at the Church of the Ascension, so there would have been other opportunities for Potter to speak with Grant on the topic during the week.<sup>105</sup> However, if it follows the trend of dates we can more confidently locate, then the meeting more likely occurred on November 21, 1906, the second-to-last Wednesday of the month.

#### EVOLUTION AND ETHICS.

DECEMBER 19, 1906.

This meeting likely occurred on December 19, 1906, a week prior to the meeting of the American Philosophical Association on December 26, 1906.<sup>106</sup>

#### POWER, WORTH, AND REALITY.

JANUARY 23, 1907.

In January 1907, Guy A. Tawney, a visiting professor who taught “The

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<sup>102</sup> Protestant Episcopal Church Of New York. *Journal Of The One hundred And Twenty-Third Convention Of The Diocese Of New York, 1906*. J.J. Little & Co. New York, New York. (1906): 45.

<sup>103</sup> “Rev. Crapsey Loses His Case.” *The Elmira Gazette*. (Elmira, New York) November 19, 1906.

<sup>104</sup> “The Crapsey Trial.” *The New York Tribune*. (New York, New York) April 16, 1906.

<sup>105</sup> “S.N. Kane’s Funeral.” *The New York Times*. (New York, New York) November 20, 1906.

<sup>106</sup> James, William. “The Energies Of Men.” *The Philosophical Review*. Vol. XVI, No. 1 (January, 1907): 1–20.

Principles of Science,” and Walter B Pitkin, a tutor in philosophy, resigned from the philosophy department at Columbia University. This necessitated a reorganization of the faculty positions by the board of trustees. Miller advanced to the rank of professor; Montague to that of adjunct professor; Harold Chapman Brown replaced Pitkin as tutor in philosophy; Max Eastman replaced Brown as assistant in philosophy. It was at this meeting of the board of trustees that Calkins’ title was changed from Professor of Invertebrate Zoology to Professor of Protozoology, in recognition of his “commanding position as an investigator in this field.”<sup>107</sup>

On January 20, 1907, Grant delivered a sermon, “Good and Bad Impressions,” at Harvard’s Appleton Chapel.<sup>108</sup> William James was among the parishioners.<sup>109</sup> Two days away from retirement, James had recently returned from Columbia University where he delivered the presidential address at the American Philosophical Association. With the prompting of his former pupil, Dickinson S. Miller, James agreed to return to Columbia, in late-January, to deliver eight lectures on Pragmatism.<sup>110</sup> It was perhaps through a conversation between Grant and James, that Miller makes his first appearance in the *January Talks*.<sup>111</sup>

On January 23, 1907, Grant hosted a private meeting of prominent Episcopalian church members in his home to discuss what actions could be taken to support Algernon Crapsey. Griscom and Mitchell, junior-members of the vestry who were sympathetic to Crapsey, were likely in attendance.<sup>112</sup> Miller, who was vocal in

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<sup>107</sup> “New Columbia Professors.” *The New York Times*. (New York, New York) February 5, 1907; “The University.” *Columbia University Quarterly*. Vol. IX, No. 3. (June, 1907): 357-384; Eastman, *Enjoyment*, 268.

<sup>108</sup> “Rev. P.S. Grant To Preach Tomorrow.” *The Harvard Crimson*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts) January 19, 1907; “Good And Bad Impressions.” *The Boston Evening Transcript*. (Boston, Massachusetts) January 21, 1907.

<sup>109</sup> James, William. *The Letters of William James Vol. II*. The Atlantic Monthly Press. Boston, Massachusetts. (1920): 262-263.

<sup>110</sup> James, “The Energies Of Men,” (1907); James, William; Scott, Frederick J. Down (ed.) *William James: Selected Unpublished Correspondence 1885-1910*. Ohio State University Press. Columbus, Ohio. (1986): 429; 432.

<sup>111</sup> Mitchell, *Talks*, 99.

<sup>112</sup> Griscom, Jr., Clement Acton.(G. Hijo.) “Questions And Answers.” *The Theosophical Quarterly*. Vol. IV, No. 3 (January, 1907): 275-277; “Clergymen Discuss Crapsey Situation.” *The Standard Union*. (Brooklyn, New York) January 23, 1907; Clark, C.C. “The Chapel of the Comforter, Greenwich Village, New York.” *Clarence Carroll Clark*

his support of Crapsey, may have also been present.<sup>113</sup> With Grant's meeting taking place on January 23, 1907, it is possible that the January meeting occurred that same evening.

#### MYSTICISM AND FAITH.

FEBRUARY 20, 1907.

In late-January and early February, William James delivered his Pragmatism lectures at Columbia, which many of the Participants of the *Talks* attended. In a letter to his brother, Henry James, William James states:

I lunched, dined, and sometimes breakfasted, out, everyday of my stay, vibrated between 44th—seldom going lower—and 149th, with Columbia University at 116th as my chief relay station, the magnificent space-devouring Subway, roaring me back and forth, lecturing to a thousand daily, and having four separate dinners at the Columbia Faculty Club, where colleagues severally compassed me about, many of them being old students of mine, wagged their tongues at me and made me explain.<sup>114</sup>

Miller also writes:

The [other dinners] were impromptu meetings arranged either by members of the Department of Philosophy at Columbia or a wider group. At one of them Mr. James sat in a literal circle of chairs, with professors of Biology, Mathematics, etc., as well as Philosophy, and answered in a particularly friendly and charming way the frank objections of a group that were by no means all opponents. At the close, when he was thanked for his patience, he remarked in his humorously disclaiming manner that he was not accustomed to be taken so seriously. Privately he remarked how pleasantly such an unaffected, easy meeting contrasted with a certain formal and august dinner

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*Papers*. (MS 393.) Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

<sup>113</sup> Miller, Dickinson S. "Dr. Crapsey's Heresy." *The New York Times*. (New York, New York) October 28, 1906.

<sup>114</sup> James, *Letters of William James*, 263-265.

club, the exaggerated amusement of the diners at each other's jokes, etc.<sup>115</sup>

Miller himself would host a dinner for James, which Mitchell and Woodbridge attended, and likely other participants of the *Talks*. "The Mathematician" states:

You remember, C—, that very pleasant evening given us by the Oxonian at the close of James's lectures here, when he had us all dine together, and our "round table talk" afterwards? The breadth and human sympathy of the man seemed so much greater than the system he was defending.<sup>116</sup>

One of the first events Max Eastman attended after entering Columbia University was a dinner in honor of James. Eastman writes:

We gave James a dinner at the Faculty Club—"we" meaning the departments of philosophy and psychology. After dinner he stood up at his place, and we each in turn asked him a question. When it came my turn, I did not ask one question, but four or five connected ones in the manner of Socrates.<sup>117</sup>

The February meeting at The Benedick likely occurred on February 20, 1907, as that was the date that Calkins attended the Society For Experimental Biology (see Calkins bio.) This marks the first appearance of "The Youth" in *Talks*, suggesting that his introduction to the meetings occurred during the events surrounding James's visit to New York.

#### THE HISTORIAN'S VIEW.

MARCH 20, 1907.

There are not many clues as to the date of this talk except for a passing reference by "The Mathematician," who states: "I regret to say the Oxonian telephoned me an hour or so ago that he would be unable to come out tonight having had a rather nasty fall which keeps him on his back."<sup>118</sup> While this does not provide us much

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<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 265.

<sup>116</sup> Mitchell, *Talks*, 263.

<sup>117</sup> Eastman, *Enjoyment*, 286-287.

<sup>118</sup> Mitchell, *Talks*, 147.

information to date the *Talk* conclusively, it might provide some context for the statement of “The Mathematician.” On March 19, 1907, an unexpected storm brought “snow and rain, fog and slush and thunder and lightning to New York, all in twelve hours,” and was described as the “nastiest” of the season.<sup>119</sup> If this was a contributing factor to the “nasty fall” of “The Oxonian,” then it would place it within a timeframe consistent with the meetings taking place on the second-to-last Wednesday of the month, in this case, March 20, 1907.

Around this time Grant first met the Socialist preacher, Alexander Irvine, and subsequently invited him to preach on Sunday nights at the Chapel of the Comforter, the mission of the Church of the Ascension.<sup>120</sup> His developing interest in Socialism can be seen in the *Talks* with the following statement:

There you have the keynote of what must be the religion of the future. It must be practical. Intensely practical. For myself, I find I lay less stress upon beliefs, and more upon works. In fact, the effect of any belief upon character is largely the result of the higher forms of conduct, and the new and nobler deeds that belief has inspired. What does he do? That is the question I always want answered of those I meet, and it is the question I think life asks us: What are we doing? And in the end it will be, What have we done? Religion must be practical. So practical that, I think sometimes, it will be a sort of spiritual socialism.<sup>121</sup>

#### ORGANIZATION AND RELIGION.

APRIL 17, 1907.

This meeting likely occurred on April 17, 1907.

#### SIGNS OF THE TIMES.

MAY 22, 1907.

Clues that Signs of the Times occurred on May 22, 1907, can be found in an

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<sup>119</sup> “Lightning Follows Snow.” *The Sun*. (New York, New York) March 20, 1907.

<sup>120</sup> “Purpose Of Sunday Night Meetings.” *The Evening Herald*. (Fall River, Massachusetts) May 7, 1908; Irvine, Alexander. *From the Bottom Up: The Life Story of Alexander Irvine*. Gosset & Dunlop. New York, New York (1910): 274-275.

<sup>121</sup> Mitchell, *Talks*, 208.

exchange between “The Editor,” “The Clergyman,” and “The Mathematician.”

The Editor: I wish you had been at his church last Sunday evening, E—. It was one of the most interesting services I ever attended. F— had a Jewish Rabbi there who gave the sermon or address. I want to ask him about it when the Mathematician is done playing the host.

Good evening, F—. We were just talking of that very interesting service last Sunday. What a remarkable speaker that Jewish Rabbi is! Who is he?”

The Clergyman: Rabbi—. He was educated here, and first preached here. Then he went west to S—, where he had a large synagogue and was very successful. They wanted him to stay, but he decided to come back to this city and found a free synagogue; which means, I think, a pretty liberal one.

The Editor: He is certainly an able speaker. I have rarely listened to more finished eloquence, though he was evidently talking extemporaneously, or at least without notes. And, his oratory quite apart, one could not help being impressed by the movement of his thought. The “Fellowship of Religions” is a theme which presents difficulties,—after all these centuries of warring creeds,—yet he did not dodge or evade them; he faced them squarely, but with a penetration and a tact which compelled my admiration. Is it not unusual for a Jewish Rabbi to take part in a Christian service and preach from an Episcopal pulpit?”

The Clergyman: I do not remember ever having heard of its being done before, but there is no essential reason why it should not have been. The service, you know, was one of the joint services of the State Conference of Religion.

The Mathematician: I am afraid I do not know. I was even unaware of the existence of such an organization. What is it?

The Clergyman: It is a body organized about eight years ago by ministers and laymen of a number of different denominations. At the start I think there were twelve different religious bodies represented. The motto they adopted



expresses the general attitude of the Conference, “Religions are many, Religion is one.” They hold that individual beliefs should be loyally maintained, but that Religion unites many whom Theology divides, and that in religious work much may be gained from co-operation and mutual understanding. This the conference aims to promote. They have a number of meetings for addresses and discussion, and frequently common services—such as that in our Church last week. They do not seek to change anyone's theology or belief, but only to work together for the common end of personal and social righteousness.

The Editor: What an admirable idea it is!<sup>122</sup>

On Sunday, May 19, 1907, the Rabbi Stephen Wise delivered a sermon, “The Possibilities of Religious Fellowship,” at Church of the Ascension, in connection with The New York State Conference of Religion.<sup>123</sup> Rabbi Wise opened the Free Synagogue in Manhattan a month earlier, and was, in some regards, a Jewish counterpart to Grant.<sup>124</sup> Wise began his career as assistant Rabbi of Congregation B’nai Jeshurun in New York’s Upper West Side. From 1900-1906 Wise served as rabbi of the Congregation of Beth Israel in Portland, Oregon.<sup>125</sup> Like Grant, Wise was outspoken on child labor, and other issues of the day, and upon returning to New York in 1906, he became a founder of the A.C.L.U., and a board member for the N.A.A.C.P. In 1908 Wise would join Booker T. Washington in eulogizing Bishop Potter in a memorial service with Grant.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Mitchell, *Talks*, 271-273.

<sup>123</sup> “Religious Notices.” *The New York Tribune*. (New York, New York) May 18, 1907; “General Items This Week.” *The New York Tribune*. (New York, New York) May 18, 1907; “Local Meetings.” *Addresses Before The New York State Conference of Religion*. Series V., No. 3 (June, 1907): 46.

<sup>124</sup> “For Free Synagogue.” *The New York Tribune*. (New York, New York) April 15, 1907; Medoff, Rafael. *The Jews Should Keep Quiet*. University Of Nebraska Press. Lincoln, Nebraska. (2019): 2-3, 117.

<sup>125</sup> “Rev. Dr. Wise Surprises Emanu-El Trustees.” *The New York Times*. (New York, New York) January 7, 1906.

<sup>126</sup> “Praise For Dr. Wise.” *The New York Tribune*. (New York, New York) December 21, 1908.

If the May 19, 1907, service at the Ascension is the same service which is referenced in the Talks, then we can place this discussion in the following week. This is supported, again, by the absence of Calkins on May 22, 1907, who was at the meeting of the Society For Experimental Biology and Medicine (see Calkins bio.)

HAS THE CHURCH FAILED?  
BETWEEN JULY 20 & July 25, 1907.

Mitchell and Robinson are the only participants who appear in the final chapter of *Talks*, as Mitchell states:

Some weeks later the city was scorching in a sudden breathless heat. The Mathematician's personal affairs had kept him in town longer than was his wont, till he had grown used to solitary dining in deserted clubs and restaurants. This afternoon, however, as he passed from the quivering glare of the streets to the dim quiet of the club, he had met the Historian.<sup>127</sup>

Based on this information, we can assume their discussion occurred sometime in the week of July 21-July 27, 1907, during which time New York was experiencing a heatwave.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Mitchell, *Talks*, 312.

<sup>128</sup> "Five Persons Die From Heat." *The Buffalo Enquirer*. (Buffalo, New York.) July 20, 1907; "Suffering And Death In Wake Of Heat Wave." *The Evening World*. (New York, New York.) July 25, 1907.

### PART III. EPILOGUE.

On October 21, 1907, a year after the first discussion at The Benedick, a meeting was held for the purpose of reorganizing and formalizing the “Philosophical Club” at Columbia University. At the meeting in which Woodbridge was elected honorary president, a committee of officers was elected, and the topic of merging with the Ethical Society was discussed. Max Eastman debated “The Relation of Ethics and Metaphysics,” which Dewey summarized before the topic was opened for discussion.<sup>129</sup> At the following meeting, on November 4, Montague read a paper titled “A Definition of Religion,” which likely bore resemblance to the paper, “A Definition of Religion, Based upon an Examination of the Various Forms of Religious Belief,” presented by the “Social Philosopher” during the *Talks*.<sup>130</sup> Like its previous incarnation, The Philosophical Club lasted one academic year, holding its final meeting in May, 1908.<sup>131</sup>

In the early part of May, 1908 Mitchell’s serialized articles were published as the book *Talks on Religion*.<sup>132</sup> In the editorial comments of the *Columbia University Quarterly* it was stated:

The year 1908-09 was an unusually encouraging one for those who are interested in the religious development of the University...The publication during the year of *Talks on Religion*, edited by Professor H.B. Mitchell, gave evidence of the deep interest in religious matters which is felt among the scholars of the University—even, and perhaps particularly, among those who have no formal denominational affiliations.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> “Philosophical Club To Be Formed.” *The Columbia Spectator*. (New York, New York) October 15, 1907; “Philosophical Club Organizes Tonight.” *The Columbia Spectator*. (New York, New York) October 21, 1907; “Philosophical Club Organizes.” *The Columbia Spectator*. (New York, New York) October 22, 1907.

<sup>130</sup> “Prof. Montague on Religion.” *The Columbia Spectator*. (New York, New York) November 1, 1907; Mitchell, *Talks*, 86.

<sup>131</sup> “Calendar Of The Day.” *The Columbia Spectator*. (New York, New York) May 18, 1908.

<sup>132</sup> “Announcement Of New York Books.” *The New York Times*. (New York, New York) May 2, 1908.

<sup>133</sup> “Editorial Comment.” *Columbia University Quarterly*. Vol. XI, No. 4. (September, 1909): 485-491.

The success of the *Talks* would ultimately result in a more formal exchange of views published in Columbia University's *Lectures On Science Philosophy And Art* (1908,) a series of twenty-one addresses delivered in 1907-1908. Contributions from Crampton, Robinson, Woodbridge, and Dewey were included.<sup>134</sup>

At the same time, Mitchell was nominated as Chairman of the Committee Instruction for college courses. In this capacity, Mitchell advised Nicholas Murray Butler, President of Columbia University, on the merits of a curriculum which included religious education.<sup>135</sup> Johnston would describe Mitchell's work in pages of *Harper's Weekly*, stating: "The most noteworthy thing in the world today is the general revival of interest in religion...The fact next in interest and in promise and potency for the future is the renewal of the ideals of education in America."<sup>136</sup> Mitchell would champion the cause of religious education throughout his tenure at Columbia. In 1911 Mitchell would deliver an address on the occasion of the commencement exercises in which he "pleaded for a broader education in the universities," and expressed "the hope that the college education should stand for something more than the mere amassing of a certain amount of technical knowledge."<sup>137</sup>

In 1910, Mitchell and the Theosophists had a falling out with Grant over a disagreement involving the activities of Alexander Irvine at the Chapel of the Comforter.<sup>138</sup> When Irvine was removed from the pulpit, the inner group of the GTS,

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<sup>134</sup> Slosson, E.E. *Great American Universities*. The MacMillan Company. New York, New York, (1910): 453-454; (Various.) *Lectures On Science, Philosophy, And Art*. The Columbia University Press. New York, New York (1908).

<sup>135</sup> Columbia University. *Columbia University Archives*. Central Files (Office of the President records) 1890-1984. Mitchell, Henry Bedinger file, 1900-1918. (1 Folder), 5/1900-4/1918. Box 662 Folder 12.

<sup>136</sup> Johnston, Charles. "A New Educational Ideal At Columbia." *Harper's Weekly*. Vol. LIV., No. 2808. (October 15, 1910): 13.

<sup>137</sup> "Notes." *Columbia Alumni News*. Vol. II, No. 20. (February 16, 1911): 342.

<sup>138</sup> The seven leading members of the Order of the Living Christ were: Theodora Dodge (1871-1936); Clement A. Griscom (1868-1918); Genevieve Griscom (1868-1958); Ernest T. Hargrove (1870-1939); Charles Johnston (1867-1931); Archibald Keightley (1859-1930); Henry Bedinger Mitchell (1874-1956.) "Dr. Keightley Without Heir." *The New York Herald Tribune*. (New York, New York) January 23, 1931; "Deaths." *The New York Times*. (New York, New York) February 2, 1936; "Julia Jenkins Shares Large Estate Of Aunt." *The Wisconsin State Journal*. (Madison,

known as the Order of the Living Christ, assumed control of the operations of the Ascension mission.<sup>139</sup> From that institution the OLC would develop the Chapel School, and the Open-Door Mission. In 1917, following the outbreak of the First World War, Mitchell would unite the efforts of his secular and spiritual vocations by assisting with the publication of both the *Chapel War Papers*, and the *Columbia War Papers*.<sup>140</sup>

In the 1920s, Mitchell and the other members of the OLC opened and operated a spiritual retreat called Chapel Farm in Riverdale, Bronx.<sup>141</sup> In 1953, after learning of H.N. Spalding's Union for the Study of the Great Religions of the World at Oxford University, the OLC focused their efforts on creating a similar institution in the United States. Shortly before his death in 1956, J.F.B. Mitchell met with religious scholar Kenneth Morgan to enlist his aid in acting as a liaison between Harvard University and the GTS for a project that would ultimately result in Colgate University's Chapel House, and Harvard University's Center for the Study of World Religions.<sup>142</sup> In the deed of gift to Harvard, an alloy of the statement of purpose from

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Wisconsin) February 26, 1936; *In the Matter of Proving the Last Will and Testament of Ernest Hargrove As a Will of Real and Personal Property*; Appellate Division of the Supreme Court of New York, First Department Jun 27, 1941; 28 N.Y.S.2d 571 (N.Y. App. Div. 1941.); Wills; Author: Jefferson County (West Virginia.) County Clerk; Probate Place: Jefferson, West Virginia; "Mrs. Clement Griscom." *The New York Times*. (New York, New York), September 4, 1958; Last Will and Testament of Genevieve Ludlow Griscom (Will 1180P1955) Bronx County (New York.) Surrogate's Court County of Bronx; New York, New York.

<sup>139</sup> Mitchell, Henry Bedinger. "Institutional Work and the Church." *The New Church Messenger*. CXIX, No. 1 (July 7, 1920.): 8-10, 13.

<sup>140</sup> Mitchell, Henry Bedinger. "Our Headline Policy: An Appeal To The Press." *Columbia War Papers*. (New York, New York.) Vol. I, No. 4. (1917): 3-7; Chapel of the Comforter War Committee. *How To Help: Practical Economy: A Test of Our Christianity*. The Chapel of the Comforter. New York, New York (1917.)

<sup>141</sup> *The People of The State of New York ex rel. Outer Court, Incorporated, Of The Order of the Living Christ, Relator, v. William Stanley Miller and Others, as Commissioners of Taxes and Assessments of the City of New York, Respondents*. Supreme Court, Special Term, New York County, December 21, 1936. 161 Misc. 603.292 N.Y.S. 674.

<sup>142</sup> Morgan, Kenneth W. *Memories*. Unpublished. 257-277; Morgan, Kenneth W. "The Establishment of the Center." *CSWR Bulletin*. (Summer, 1977): 2-14.

the Theosophical Society, and the Union for the Study of the Great Religions of the World, the OLC expressed their wish for how the financial endowment should be allocated.

THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY.	UNION FOR THE STUDY OF THE GREAT RELIGIONS.	CSWR DEED OF GIFT.
<p>The Society [...] strives to create the nucleus of such a body. Many of its members believe that an acquaintance with the world's religions and philosophies will reveal, as the common and fundamental principle underlying these, that "spiritual identity of all Souls with the Oversoul" which is the basis of true brotherhood; and many of them also believe that an appreciation of the finer forces of nature and man will still further emphasize the same idea.<sup>143</sup></p>	<p>The great and richly diverse cultures of East and West—were to be studied and compared, in schools, universities, theological and other colleges and elsewhere, in their "independence, integrity and fruitful diversity."<sup>144</sup></p>	<p>The donors wish to encourage, in addition to a careful study of one's own belief, a sympathetic study of other religions "in their independence, integrity and fruitful diversity." The donors believe that such a study will show the extent to which there is a fundamental unity and reality back of all religions—a common root in the spiritual world—from which each man may gain a clearer insight and faith in the truth of his own religion.<sup>145</sup></p>

<sup>143</sup> "The Theosophical Society In America." *The Theosophical Quarterly*. Vol. I, No. 1 (July, 1903): back cover.

<sup>144</sup> "Union For Study Of Great Religions." *The Times*. (London, England.) January 27, 1953.

<sup>145</sup> "Griscom Statement for the Deed of Gift." December 24, 1957. Harvard University Archives.

Mitchell died at Chapel Farm in 1956. After his cremation, his ashes were interred with those of Griscom, Johnston, at the monument of the Order of the Living Christ in Woodlawn Cemetery, New York.

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JOHN DEWEY AND THE AMERICAN  
TRADITION OF SOCIALIST  
DEMOCRACY

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An interesting paradox appears in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As Western capitalist nations intensify their struggles amongst themselves for the division of the world in their transition towards the stage of modern imperialism, they simultaneously manage to kidnap the concept of democracy for themselves and juxtapose it against the ‘authoritarianism’ of worker, peasant, and national struggles in the global South and East. In the capitalist West, this equating of capitalism with democracy, and socialism with authoritarianism, persists today. It persists in a form disconnected from any concrete investigation of the functional operations of either, their unity is pure and abstract, it restricts any desecration of its purity brought about by the critical examination of the facts of the world. However, the theoretically fixed marriage of capitalism and democracy, fixed by the liberal capitalists of the west, encounters – as all unfit couples do – an oxymoronic existence. How can capitalism, a system grounded in private accumulation of socialized production, bear any relation to democracy, a relational form of life dominated by consultation, participation, and the general will? The incongruity of the two have forced liberals in the West to choose: democracy or the tyranny of capital.

In this essay I will argue that John Dewey, perhaps the most prominent 20<sup>th</sup> century American theorist of democracy, understood that capitalist relations hinder democracy in the workplace, and, by the extension of business interests into all other spheres of life, also erode the democratic potential in media, education, and existing political institutions. Furthermore, I will argue that Dewey’s position was already anticipated by the US’s first democratic theorist, Thomas Jefferson, and that this anticipation was shared and enriched by the first generation of homegrown socialists, who in their struggle against the tyranny of capital, ideologically grounded themselves on Jefferson’s democratic ideals.

### **Thomas Jefferson and the First American Socialists**

In *Three Heroes*, a short story about Simon Bolivar, Father Hidalgo, and San Martin, the Cuban philosopher and poet José Martí says that,

*Their mistakes must be forgiven, because the good they did was greater than their faults. Men cannot be more perfect than the sun. The sun burns with the same light rays that warm us up. The sun has spots. Ungrateful men only talk about the spots.*

*Grateful men talk about the light.*<sup>1</sup>

I think a similar, perhaps less forgiving, view can be held with respect to Thomas Jefferson. Although nothing can erase his role as a slave master and leading figure in the US's genocide of native peoples, it is indubitable that his democratic and republican ideals served as the ideological ground for socialist, abolitionist, and other progressive movements in the US.<sup>2</sup> Just like the spots cannot be erased to emphasize the light, the light cannot be erased to emphasize the spots. With Jefferson's faults in mind, I will proceed to develop how the progressive elements of his thought, namely, his democratic creed and attentiveness to the incompatibility of capitalist production and democracy, influenced radical movements from the 1820s onward, setting the ground for John Dewey's philosophy in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century.

For Thomas Jefferson, the American forefather under whose pen and revolutionary ideas the US's independence was declared, the incompatibility of capitalism and democracy was encountered once capitalism grew out of its early mercantilist shell and began to metamorphize into large scale manufacturing. The embryonic form of industrial capitalism's expansion had begun to frighten him towards the end of his life. Jefferson worried that the "obvious contradiction between democracy and capitalism" would "destroy [the] freedoms" which were meant to be secured by the democratic experiment.<sup>3</sup> This observation led him to bifurcate 'aristocrats' who "fear and distrust the people, and wish to draw all powers from them into the hands of the higher classes [i.e., what he called "banking institutions and monied incorporations"]," and the 'democrats' who "identify with the people, have confidence in them, cherish and consider them as the honest and safe depository of

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<sup>1</sup> José Martí J, (1891), "Tres Héroes." In *Páginas Escogidas*, ed. Óscar Montoya (Bogotá: Editorial Norma, 1994), 41.

<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that the evil present in his positions with respect to African slavery and indigenous peoples is not uniquely Jeffersonian. As Domenico Losurdo has shown in his book, *Liberalism: A Counter-History*, the liberal revolutions and its theorists all contain a paradoxical "tangle of freedom and oppression," wherein the "twin birth" of anti-monarchist liberal ideals arise conjointly with enslaving and genocidal practices. Domenico Losurdo, *Liberalism: A Counter-History*, trans. Gregory Elliott (Brooklyn: Verso Books, 2014), 34, 37.

<sup>3</sup> Noam Chomsky, "Democracy and Education," *Counterpoints* 422, (2012): 60.

the public interest.”<sup>4</sup>

Jefferson, amongst Thomas Paine and others in his time, was not alone in thinking that a capital-oriented society threatened the democratic freedoms fought for less than half a century prior. In line with their democratic spirit, and cautious of the threat presented by capitalism, the first generation of socialists were born. The spawn of socialist democrats, which blossomed in the 1820s, shared the sentiment Langdon Byllesby expressed in his *Observations on the Sources and Effects of Unequal Wealth*,

It remained for the now sage and venerable Thomas Jefferson, to give mankind a true description of their destiny, in the following concise and emphatic sentences: ‘All men are created free and equal – with an unalienable right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.’<sup>5</sup>

However, their veneration and belief in Jefferson’s democratic ideals led them beyond Jefferson and towards socialism, what Cornelius Blatchly saw as their “logical radical conclusions.”<sup>6</sup> When these socialist conclusions were presented to Jefferson by Blatchly, Jefferson never fully objected. Although he pronounced his skepticism for their applicability to an individual state, he agreed with its spirit and returned “esteem and respect” to Blatchly for his work.<sup>7</sup>

The Jeffersonian spirit expressed through the writings of Blatchly, Byllesby, William Maclure, and Daniel Raymond culminated in the establishment of organizational forms wherein these struggles for democracy could be fought in the economic and political realm. Philadelphia saw the first worker’s union and party, the Working Man’s Party, established in 1827 by the great socialist orator William

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<sup>4</sup> “From Thomas Jefferson to Henry Lee, 10 August 1824,” *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/98-01-02-4451>.

<sup>5</sup> Langdon Byllesby, *Observations on the Sources and Effects of Unequal Wealth: With Propositions Towards Remedying the Disparity of Profit in Pursuing the Arts of Life and Establishing Security in Individual Prospects and Resources* (New York: Russel & Russel, 1961), 25.

<sup>6</sup> David Harris, *Socialist Origins in the United States* (Netherlands: Van Gorcum & Company, 1966), 10.

<sup>7</sup> Harris, *Socialist Origins in the United States*, 10. “From Thomas Jefferson to Cornelius C. Blatchly, 21 October 1822,” *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/98-01-02-3106>.

Heighton. Two years after the better-known Working Man's Party of New York would be founded by Thomas Skidmore and Robert Dale Owen, synthesizing the emerging traditions of socialist and utopian communalist struggles.

What these movements and thinkers shared was an understanding that although the Jeffersonian ideals were laudable, to translate them into practice they must be extended beyond the formalistic shell in which they were enclosed within the existing political structures. For the democratic creed to stay alive, the liberal theories which sustained it must have been sublated. As William Maclure eloquently notes,

Millions have not been practically free in any country or under any form of government, where they have been emancipated from physical oppression, by liberal theories.<sup>8</sup>

A similar sentiment was already expressed by Thomas Paine in his 1795 *Agrarian Justice*, wherein two decades after the revolution, he realizes that

The present state of civilization is as odious as it is unjust. It is absolutely the opposite of what it should be, and it is necessary that a revolution should be made in it. The contrast of affluence and wretchedness continually meeting and offending the eye, is like dead and living bodies chained together.<sup>9</sup>

The democratic revolution could not limit itself to the political realm. Democracy, for it to genuinely exist in everyday American life, had to be expanded into the workplaces where American's spent most of their day. The effects of not doing so would not only sustain the tyranny of the wage-slave master, but also perpetuate their interest in the formal democratic structures that exist in the political realm, effectively having them function more as an oligarchy, or a democracy for the rich, than as a genuine popular democracy. Either way, the tension Jefferson had observed between the aristocratic and the democratic individual, between capitalism and democracy, forged itself in the socialist struggles for the expansion of democracy in the generation after Jefferson. The spirit of this generation was carried throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the abolitionist, labor, and socialist movements. The three came together to throw off the yolk of America's second greatest sin, African slavery. Here,

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<sup>8</sup> William Maclure, *Opinions on Various Subjects Vol. 1* (Nabu Press, 2011), 450.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas Paine, *Agrarian Justice*. In *The Thomas Paine Reader*, ed. Michael Foot and Isaac Kramnick (London: Penguin Classics, 1987), 482.

in a Republican party filled with abolitionists, labor radicals, and German communists from the 1848 revolutions in Europe, the democratic ethos of the Jeffersonian ideal triumphed as a race of humans was liberated from the chains of chattel slavery, while the class of parasitic men who owned them were expropriated of their most valuable form of capital – slave laborers.

### **Deweyan Democracy**

The 19<sup>th</sup> century struggles forged in the spirit of Jeffersonian democracy flowered in a plurality of forms around the turn of the new century. From the Socialist Labor Party, the Socialist Party, the Industrial Workers of the World and the Communist Party, all held, in their own form, their programs to be the modern embodiment of the radical flank of the revolutionary tradition. Along with this tradition was the philosopher-polymath John Dewey, one of the few American thinkers to have experienced both the civil and cold war. Known as “America’s philosopher of democracy,” John Dewey’s political and ethical thought was another form through which the democratic ideals of Jefferson, whom he considered to be “our first great democrat,” took shape in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early/mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>10</sup> Although writing over 37 books and 766 articles over a span of almost 70 years, his Jeffersonian faith in the democratic creed was never absent.

While still under the influence of George Morris’s Hegelian idealism he wrote in his 1888 text, *The Ethics of Democracy*, that democracy was synonymous to “the ultimate, ethical ideal of humanity.”<sup>11</sup> More than 50 years later, in a speech given at a meeting commemorating his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday, he said that one must “get rid of the habit of thinking of democracy as something institutional and external and to acquire the habit of treating it as a way of personal life [and] to realize that democracy is a *moral ideal* and so far as it becomes a fact is a moral fact.”<sup>12</sup> Although Dewey’s thought underwent great transformations as he moved from Hegelianism to Pragmatism, his belief in the “democratic creed” as a relational, active, and beyond-institutional ethical

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<sup>10</sup> David Fott, *John Dewey: America’s Philosopher of Democracy* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1998). LW 14:202.

<sup>11</sup> John Dewey, *The Collected Works of John Dewey, 1882-1953*, ed. by Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1967-1990), EW 1:249.

<sup>12</sup> LW 14:228.



ideal, remained the same.<sup>13</sup>

For Dewey democracy was not something reducible to what we do once a year in an election booth. Democracy, instead, must be thought of as “a personal way of individual life.”<sup>14</sup> Democracy as a way of life, as an ideal ethical relation which surpasses its reduction to the electoral formalism of American politics, Dewey notes, “involves nothing fundamentally new,” its application merely gives “new practical meaning [to] old ideas.”<sup>15</sup> These ‘old ideas’ refer to the Jeffersonian tradition, and its socialist inheritors which we examined in the previous section.<sup>16</sup> In line with this home-grown tradition of socialism, Dewey carries on the conception that if democracy is our ideal, then it must be expanded beyond the shallowness of our electoral politics. In *Liberalism and Social Action* Dewey argues that, for liberalism to remain relevant, it “must now become radical,” that is, its ends can be achieved,

*only as control of the means of production and distribution is taken out of the hands*

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<sup>13</sup> LW 14:226.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> This is seen clearest in two of his heroes – Thomas Jefferson and Eugene Debs (William James and Walt Whitman were the other two). Peter Gibbon, “John Dewey: Portrait of a Progressive Thinker,” *Humanities*, Vol 40 No. 2 (Spring 2019): <https://www.neh.gov/article/john-dewey-portrait-progressive-thinker> This is also seen in the admiration he expressed, in his article “A Great American Prophet,” for utopian socialist Edward Bellamy and his texts *Looking Backwards* and *Equality*, where he says that “what distinguishes Bellamy is the clear ardor with which he grasped the human meaning of democracy as an idea of equality and liberty, and portrayed the complete contradiction between our present economic system and the realization of human equality and liberty.” LW 9:103. While president of the socialist and radical liberal League of Independent Political Action, he asked Emma Bellamy (Edward’s widow) for funds in aid of the Socialist Party candidate Norman Thomas’ campaign. For financial reasons Emma was unable to provide any funds but assured she was hopeful for their victory and thankful for their advancement of the socialist cause. Dewey J., “From Emma S. Bellamy to John Dewey, 27 October 1932, (N. 09002),” in *The Correspondence of John Dewey, 1871-2007*, ed. Larry A. Hickman, Vol. 2 (Southern Illinois University Press, 2008).

[http://pm.nlx.com.proxy.lib.siu.edu/xtf/view?docId=dewey\\_c\\_ii/dewey\\_c\\_ii.02.xml;query=a%20great%20american%20prophet%20;brand=default;hit.rank=1#rank1](http://pm.nlx.com.proxy.lib.siu.edu/xtf/view?docId=dewey_c_ii/dewey_c_ii.02.xml;query=a%20great%20american%20prophet%20;brand=default;hit.rank=1#rank1)

*of individuals who exercise powers created socially for narrow individual interests. The ends remain valid. But the means of attaining them demand a radical change in economic institutions and the political arrangements based on them. These changes are necessary in order that social control of forces and agencies socially created may accrue to the liberation of all individuals associated together in the great undertaking of building a life that expresses and promotes human liberty.*<sup>17</sup>

Although at times calling this ‘radical liberalism’ and at other times calling it ‘democratic socialism,’ or simply ‘socialism,’ the title itself seems to be irrelevant for Dewey, what matters is the concern for the democratization of “social organization [and its ]extending to all the areas and ways of living.”<sup>18</sup> This must include the sphere of production, where people spend most of their time. However, if Dewey is going to be thought of as a liberal, this categorization must be strictly assigned only on the basis that he shares the ideal ends of the tradition of liberalism, namely, the goal of a social arrangement which guarantees conditions for human liberty and flourishing. Under this broad understanding, all socialists, if not also all communists, would also be liberals. Additionally, Dewey, like the early socialist movement in the US and continental Europe, performed a radical ‘reconstruction’ out of liberalism and individualism. He believed “liberalism [was] still impeded by remnants of its earlier *laissez faire* phase, with its opposition of society and the individual,” and his philosophy, even from its idealist stage, understood the need to transcend the classical liberal bifurcation of the individual and society.<sup>19</sup> In the *Ethics of Democracy*, for instance, Dewey argues that,

The theory of the ‘social organism,’ that theory that men are not isolated non-social atoms, but are men only when in intrinsic relations to men, has wholly superseded the theory of men as an aggregate, as a heap of grains of sand needing some factitious mortar to put them into semblance of order.<sup>20</sup>

This metaphysical separation of the individual and the social found in classical liberalism led to the conclusion that ‘social arrangements’ are merely a means the atomized individual uses *for* their individual interests. Although this may be partially

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<sup>17</sup> LW 11:45, 28.

<sup>18</sup> LW 11:25.

<sup>19</sup> LW 11:63.

<sup>20</sup> EW 1:231.

true, Dewey urges in his 1920 *Reconstruction in Philosophy* that social arrangements are also a “means of *creating* individuals,” that is, the existence of individuals presupposes social arrangements.<sup>21</sup> For Dewey, liberalism’s Robinsonade fixation on the individual commits the “most pervasive fallacy of philosophic thinking,” it “neglect[s] the indispensability of context.”<sup>22</sup> This foundational error pollutes, in various forms, its other spheres of thought. For instance, classical liberal ‘freedom’ is always ‘freedom from,’ a negative form of freedom. In the sphere of rights discourse, this translates into negative rights composed of assertions of what can’t be done to you. However, when the individual is understood as necessarily a social product, one which always remains active in and through social arrangements, the conception of positive freedoms may be introduced. The individual shouldn’t just not face limitations as they engage in choosing how they’ll act within the social realm; they must also have the power to fulfill what they choose even when no direct limitations are involved. In the political sphere of rights discourse, this reflects itself in the form of positive rights, that is, what universally must be given to the individual by the social so that the individual has the positive freedom to exert their will, in a manner non-antagonistic to the social, within the social. If being radical consists of engaging with the root, or the foundation, then it must be said that Dewey effects a radical reconstruction in liberalism and individualism. After their reconstruction each is effectively something *qualitatively new* to what it previously was.

Under the reconstructed understanding of the individual, Dewey would conclude that the modern conditions of socialized production required socialized control of production for genuine individuality to exist. The expansion of democracy into an economic realm dominated by corporations which have socialized production, but which have retained control and accumulation privatized, is a precondition for genuine individuality. An individual, if he constitutes a part of the working class, does not have the power to freely exercise their will on the developments in technology and production, not because these developments are in themselves restricting, but because the relations under which they have occurred present fetters for their freeing potentials. Arriving at these conclusions Dewey is effectively recapturing the spirit of the first generation of socialist who argued that our democratic revolution needed to be expanded into the economic realm to be genuinely fulfilled. This expansion of democracy into the economic realm would retroactively also enrich the democratic structures within a political machinery which he saw as effectively working as a

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<sup>21</sup> MW 12:191.

<sup>22</sup> LW 6:5.

“shadow cast on society by big business.”<sup>23</sup>

Dewey understood that the power of those who own the means of production, and who used their money and power to have the political machinery reflect their interests, was also exerted in other spheres where democratic life should have prevailed. In his 1933 essay, “Imperative Need: A New Radical Party,” he argues that,

Power today resides in control of the means of production, exchange, publicity, transportation and communication. Whoever owns them rules the life of the country, not necessarily by intention, not necessarily by deliberate corruption of the nominal government, but by necessity. Power is power and must act, and it must act according to the nature of the machinery through which it operates. In this case, the machinery is business for private profit through private control of banking, land, industry, reinforced by command of the press, press agents and other means of publicity and propaganda.<sup>24</sup>

Dewey argued education was an essential tool to combat the owning class’s manipulation of popular consent through anti-democratic media practices. Noam Chomsky, author of one of the greatest texts on media manipulation, *Manufacturing Consent*, argued that Dewey hoped “education, of the kind he was talking about, the production of free human beings, would be one of the means of undermining this absolutist monstrosity.”<sup>25</sup> However, for Dewey this education wasn’t simply the passive reception of a lecture from an instructor; instead, basing himself on the progressive methods of the previous centuries’ Pestalozzian system (which he saw as a systematized form of ideas whose germ was already in Rousseau’s *Émile*), Dewey argues in his *Schools of To-Morrow* that teaching methods must adjust themselves to a form of “learning by doing” which combines theory and practice, mental and physical labor.<sup>26</sup>

Dewey’s work on education also echoes that of American socialist William Maclure who wrote 70 years prior in his *Opinions on Various Subjects Vol. 1* that education must combine physical and mental work because it,

*gives a habit of working and thinking conjointly, which lasts during life, and doubles*

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<sup>23</sup> LW 6:163.

<sup>24</sup> LW 9:76.

<sup>25</sup> Chomsky, “Democracy and Education,” 63.

<sup>26</sup> MW 8:253.

*their powers of production, while it alleviates the fatigue of labor, by a more agreeable occupation of the mind. The teaching by substances or their representations, is much more correct and pleasant, than the dry and vague description of the master; and accompanying the lesson with a muscular exercise is far more healthy, than sitting two or three more hours on a stool in one position, where both body and mind remain under very fatiguing constraint, injurious equally to the powers and faculties, exhausting the attention, without which no lasting impression can be made either on adults or children.*<sup>27</sup>

To effect this transformation in education Maclure proposed what he called “industrial schools.”<sup>28</sup> Like Maclure had argued 70 years prior, Dewey felt education required a radical transformation to alter the aristocratic passive methods of learning by listening with the democratic methods of learning by doing. Although education was essential to countering the anti-democratic ethos of media propaganda, thereby enriching democratic life; to play this democratizing function, education itself had to be democratize. For Dewey, the two are seen as interdependent: democracy enriches education and democratized education enriches democratic life.

Dewey also considered democracy as a “method for identifying and solving the common problems confronted by communities.”<sup>29</sup> Democracy, for Dewey, can function as the “application of the method of experimental scientific inquiry to social life.”<sup>30</sup> This experimentalist application does not mean, as Dewey notes in *The Public and its Problems*, that democracy carries on “experimentation like that of laboratories” on social life.<sup>31</sup> Instead, as George Raymond Geiger notes, the experimentalist method comprehends that “identical methods are not everywhere applicable” and that “each

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<sup>27</sup> Maclure, *Opinions*, 87-88.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>29</sup> Mathew Festenstein, “Dewey’s Political Philosophy,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Winter 2019:

<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2019/entries/dewey-political/>.

<sup>30</sup> Kenneth Stickers K., (2011), “Dewey, Economic Democracy, and the Mondragon Cooperatives,” *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy* 3, no.2 (2011): 1.

<sup>31</sup> LW 2:361

aspect of experience demands its own methods.”<sup>32</sup> Democracy is the specific form which the experimentalist method takes in social life. This form, because it shares the open, consultive, and discursive spirit of scientific inquiry, is the one best fit for human growth. For Dewey, when growth is understood as the qualitative development of human life, it is for him “the only moral ‘end.’”<sup>33</sup> Hence, we may say that for Dewey democracy as a way of life is both an ethical ideal and the application of the experimentalist method to the sphere of social life. In this way, democracy serves as the condition for the possibility of qualitative human growth within society.

Dewey’s conception of democracy as a way of life expands democratic relations beyond voting booths into the workplace, the school, the family, etc. while also insisting that the *measure* and the *end* of all such institutions consist in their ability to promote qualitative human development and growth. Although our current economic system also sees ‘growth’ as its end, it is a radically different kind of growth. Its concept of growth is centered on capital and assessed via quantitative measurability. The economist’s obsession with gross domestic product measures is a good example. For such quantifiability to take place qualitatively incommensurable activities must transmute themselves into being qualitatively commensurable. The labor that goes into making a shoe and the labor that goes into making a coat must lose their uniqueness and obtain an abstract form in which each is comparable, as qualitative equals, in terms of quantity. The consumption of a pack of cigarettes and the consumption of an apple loses the distinction which makes one cancerous and the other healthy, they’re differences boil down to the quantitative differences in the price of purchase.

However, it is not simply the case that capitalism de-centers the human in its conception of growth, but that the relations of production its conception of growth presupposes themselves presuppose the exploitation of the wage laborer and the unhinged extraction of natural resources. This is not simply indifferent to the human-centered conception of growth but exists in an unreconcilable antagonism with it. The Deweyan emphasis on human growth as “the only moral end” requires an alternative to the degradation of planetary and human life presupposed in capitalism’s growth. Dewey understood this very well and said towards the end of his life in a letter to Jim Cork that “on the basis of *Liberalism and Social Action*, and to some extent

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<sup>32</sup> George Raymond Geiger, “Dewey’s Social and Political Philosophy.” In *The Library of Living Philosophers: The Philosophy of John Dewey*, ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp (New York: Tudor Publishing Company, 1951), 344.

<sup>33</sup> MW 12:181.

*Individualism Old and New*, I can be classed as a democratic socialist. If I were permitted to define 'socialism' and 'socialist' I would so classify myself today."<sup>34</sup>

Besides capitalism's stifling and prevention of human growth, it also perpetuates anti-democratic practices which overflow the workplace into all other spheres of social life. As we saw earlier, Dewey took problem not only with the anti-democratic character of capitalist production, but with the extension of this into electoral politics and the media. His efforts in the late 1920s and early 1930s, as the national chairman of the League of Independent Political Action (which aimed at postulating third-party candidates that ran against the two great business parties) and as the vice-president of the League for Industrial Democracy (a precursor of Students for a Democratic Society) demonstrates that he was ready to take this theoretical conclusion into the realm of praxis and militate against the democracy-devouring influence of capitalist business interests.

Under a Deweyan conception of democracy, as Kenneth Stickers argued, Democracy in the United States is thin and superficial, and the United States' boastful claims to being a beacon of democracy to the world ring hollow and contrast starkly to the authoritarian structures that dominate everyday economic life in the United States and to the plutocratic control of United States political institutions.<sup>35</sup>

Hence, for 'America's philosopher of democracy,' the broadly accepted connection of capitalism and democracy, and socialism and authoritarianism, can be understood as the result of a populace which has, because of a lack of democratic education, acquiesced to the erroneous propaganda of the capitalist-owned media and avenues of information dissemination. Instead, to genuinely claim our adherence to democracy as a way of life, we must advocate for democracy at work, that is, fight for the realization of democracy in the sphere of life which takes up a third of most people's days. Such economic democratization also creates the conditions so that the anti-democratic influence big business has on society can be eliminated. Only through socialism, that is, through democratized production aimed at serving human flourishing, can democracy genuinely become a way of life. For Dewey, far from socialism being the 'authoritarian' opposite of democracy, it is the mode of life where

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<sup>34</sup> Jim Cork, (1949), "John Dewey, Karl Marx, and Democratic Socialism," *The Antioch Review* 9, no. 4 (1949): 450, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4609377>

<sup>35</sup> Stickers, "Dewey, Economic Democracy, and the Mondragon Cooperatives," 1.

democracy can comprehensively realize itself.

### **Conclusion**

The role democracy, growth, and education play in John Dewey's experimentalist political philosophy represents a continuation of the Jeffersonian democratic ideals. These ideals have been at the root of most of our country's struggles against capitalism, racism, sexism, and imperialism. They have fertilized the ground for a home-grown form of socialism which is both similar and different to the kinds which have arisen in Europe, Asia, Latin America, and Africa. This tradition, mediated through the most well-known American philosopher of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, serves as the historical legs for the socialist movement today. Those who in our country take up the same cause of constructing a new society in which democracy becomes a way of life, and where environmental sustainability and human flourishing are prioritized, are infinitely indebted to the philosophy of John Dewey.



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BOOK REVIEW:  
FIXING THE CLIMATE

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Charles F. Sabel and David G. Victor,  
*Fixing the Climate: Strategies for an Uncertain World*  
Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2022, 235 pages,  
ISBN: 978-0691224558 (Hardcover, \$24.95)



*Volume 6 · Number 2 · 2022 · Pages 93 - 97*

John Dewey is mentioned only twice in Charles Sabel's and David Victor's *Fixing the Climate: Strategies for an Uncertain World* but his experimentalist approach runs through their diagnosis of what has gone wrong—and what can go right—in addressing climate change. Sabel and Victor cite Dewey as a theorist of “experimentalist governance” who “took uncertainty and change as the dominant problems of political life, and the need to adapt institutions to new circumstances as the continuing challenge to democracy” (10). In practice, and updated to the present day, they argue that that many global problems are best addressed through a flexible mixture of regulatory guidance and penalty defaults. The governance structures that Sabel and Victor recommend recognize the uncertainty baked into contemporary global problems as well as how both problems and solutions evolve, especially in response to technological innovation. When they write that separating “the conception and execution of large and complex projects is theoretically dubious” (107) it's easy to hear overtones of Dewey's claim that means and ends are interdependent.

As a result, *Fixing the Climate* is more than a guidebook for policymakers looking to improve their collective response to global problems. It's also a case study in how a combination of Deweyan political theory and epistemology can be put into action. This is a refreshing change of pace, directing our attention to often-overlooked aspects of Dewey's mature thinking. So, while his educational theory has and continues to receive attention (and this is arguably where his views have had the greatest practical impact), and his views on aesthetics, moral theory, and participatory democracy are still much discussed, Dewey's epistemology (or “theory of inquiry”) and its public policy implications have generally received second, third, or fourth billing. This book helps fill the gap, showing how a Deweyan approach to experimentalist problem-solving provides concrete guidance in resolving what might appear to be intractable or “wicked” problems. I would argue that, despite the paucity of direct references, this book still manages to offer a welcome addition to the secondary literature on Dewey's philosophy.

Sabel and Victor claim that the regulatory frameworks of the 1997 Kyoto Protocol and the 2015 Paris Agreement were doomed from the start: these agreements' ongoing lack of success is a result of too-rigid targets, an over-dependence on consensus-building that permitted obstruction and inaction, and an unwillingness to recognize the degree of uncertainty in any attempt to understand and respond to climate change. Or, more precisely, because the response to climate change is riven with uncertainty (Dewey would call it a deeply “problematic”

situation) it requires an experimental response that doesn't prejudge what counts as an adequate solution or the best methods of achieving it. Sabel and Victor contrast the Kyoto and Paris agreements with the 1987 Montreal Protocol regulating ozone-depleting pollutants. The Montreal Protocol, they argue, was experimentalist to the core: it built a structure plus a set of incentives and penalties that encouraged nations and chemical companies to find solutions to the problem of ozone-depletion. By providing both carrots *and* sticks the Montreal agreement was able to adapt its goals as new technological innovations were developed and to devise solutions that took the evolving science and engineering into account. On some level this was known to the framers of the Kyoto and Paris agreements but Sabel and Victor argue that policy-makers drew the wrong lessons from the success of the Montreal Protocol. Because complex global problems can only be solved through multi-national agreements, it's essential to construct frameworks that can adapt to changing and local circumstances.

The experimentalist governance that Sabel and Victor endorse is defined by three key features: an organizational structure, a deliberative approach grounded in peer review, and a keen awareness of how incentives and sanctions can support the public good (48). The organizational structure prioritizes flexibility and collaboration among key stakeholders: these ensure the experimental attitude necessary for addressing complex and uncertain situations. Deliberation, in turn, "is typically organized as peer review" (60) that brings stakeholders together, builds trust, and empowers both frontline workers and "street-level" bureaucrats (66). Finally, governance structures need to incorporate "penalty defaults" that reward prudent risk-taking while discouraging obstruction and foot-dragging: these incentives add costs to the status quo in order to encourage innovation and experimentation.

Sabel and Victor illustrate experimentalist governance structures with a series of case studies. The first three focus on "innovation at the technological frontier" (74) where complex environmental issues were addressed, in part, by the development and adoption of new technologies. These case studies—the California Air Resources Board's successful push for zero-emissions vehicles, the development and adoption of "scrubber" technology at coal-fired power plants, and the US Department of Energy's Advance Research Projects Agency (ARPA-E)—make the case that experimentalist governance structures, more than market forces alone, play a crucial role in devising effective solutions under uncertain and unpredictable conditions. The second set of case studies—focusing on Irish agricultural run-off, the integration of renewable energy sources into the California electrical grid, and efforts to stem deforestation in the Amazon—point to the importance of "contextualization" (106): of taking local

conditions into account when implementing technological solutions. Taken together, these case studies provide support not just for their vision of experimentalist governance—it really *works*, they claim—but for the relevance of experimentalist governance across a range of sectors (agriculture, energy, and forestry) and with regard to climate change in particular.

Finally, they conclude with a set of recommendations for promoting international collaboration moving forward. The Paris Agreement, they argue, can continue to play a largely symbolic role “as the climate conscience of the world” (167) while the hard work of addressing climate change will “come through standards setting at the frontier of technological innovation and, to a lesser extent, contextualization that pools local learning” (169). In some cases this will proceed through “open plurilateral agreements” (176) negotiated among particular countries with respect to specific markets and sectors. In other cases it will depend on creating institutions and governance structures that encourage information-sharing, that are aware of how different solutions may succeed depending on specific social situations, and that have the authority to serve as the “gorilla in the closet” (to use William Ruckelshaus’ phrase) when parties intentionally drag their feet.

Sabel and Victor write that, for Dewey, the response to uncertainty is “to explicitly acknowledge the fallibility of current arrangements, and make concrete problems the trigger to the adjustment of methods and clarification of goals.” Moreover, “the collaborative investigation of alternatives can only be effective if it integrates the knowledge of experts with the experience and values of citizens” (10). These insights run through their arguments and case-studies; indeed, Dewey is the only political theorist they cite. However, the Dewey they need is less the Dewey of *The Public and Its Problems* and more the Dewey of *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*: their focus is less on the conditions for democratic participation and more on the conditions for effective problem-solving (though, to be fair, Dewey would argue that these conditions overlap). This is because climate change is not just a problem of social organization and governance structures: it’s also a scientific, technological, and engineering problem, taking place in a biological and physical “existential matrix” that determines which solutions ultimately succeed.

*Fixing the Climate* offers both an illustration as well as an updating of Dewey’s views. While Dewey was well aware of the forces that could undermine effective problem-solving (as well as democratic participation), he could not have fathomed the global scope and complexity of climate change. The metaphors he typically falls back on—e.g., the “free gatherings of neighbors on the street corner”—don’t do justice to

the size of the problem, the degree of misinformation, the technological challenges, and the sophisticated forms of deception that distract from and prevent effective action. In contrast, Sabel and Victor are clear that, in addition to flexible, experimental structures, and a commitment to finding solutions that work in specific, local contexts, there must also be “a gorilla in the closet” to ensure that progress is indeed made.

Of course, this is just what we (and Dewey) would expect. The dangers that Dewey foresaw and addressed in 1927 or 1939 are not exactly the same dangers that we face today. But it’s precisely because uncertainty and complexity have increased, and because we cannot fall back on what might have worked in the past, that Dewey’s defense of experimentalism and fallibilism still resonates. And, for Dewey scholars, this is what makes *Fixing the Climate* noteworthy: Sabel and Victor show how—without a trace of nostalgia—Dewey offers a way to address complex global problems.



BOOK REVIEW:  
THE ETHICS, EPISTEMOLOGY,  
AND POLITICS OF RICHARD RORTY

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Giancarlo Marchetti (editor),  
*The Ethics, Epistemology, and Politics of Richard Rorty*  
New York, NY, Routledge Studies in American Philosophy, 294 pages,  
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I have been fascinated by Richard Rorty ever since reading *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature (PMN)* many years ago, while I was practicing law and away from studying philosophy. With all the controversy the book engendered, it rekindled my interest in philosophy and in the nature of metaphysics which Rorty seemed to want to give up for dead. Many others shared and continued to share this engagement with Rorty, as evidenced by the extensive consideration his work continues to receive.<sup>1</sup> Edited by Giancarlo Marchetti, *The Ethics, Epistemology and Politics of Richard Rorty* (2022) explores Rorty's continued influence over a broad range of philosophy. The book combines essays by distinguished Rorty scholars with the work of relative newcomers. Many essays of the book show Rorty in dialogue with other thinkers, including John Dewey, R.G. Collingwood, Ronald Dworkin, Jurgen Habermas, Donald Davidson, and James Baldwin. The book shows why Rorty continues to provoke and to be studied. I have learned a great deal from Rorty. I find he is a philosopher almost in spite of himself. And I admire his patriotism as expressed in his book *Achieving Our Country*.

I was struck by the three subjects and their ordering in this volume, with the four opening essays on ethics, followed by five essays on epistemology with the concluding set of five essays on politics. I wondered why the contributions were ordered in this manner. I also was curious about why there was no group of essays devoted explicitly to Rorty's views on metaphysics and on the nature of philosophy.

I found part of the answer to my questions in the volume's lengthy Introduction, *The Philosophy of Richard Rorty*. Rather than summarizing the fourteen contributions, Marchetti offers a broad historical overview of the development of Rorty's thought which helps to explain the subjects considered in the book and the ordering of the essays. Marchetti develops the ways that philosophical pluralism, analytic philosophy, and especially pragmatism influenced Rorty. Finding that Rorty is a "disenchanted intellectual aware of the power of language and the deceptions of classical metaphysics," Marchetti develops three themes in his discussion of Rorty which parallel the three parts of the book: ethics, epistemology, and politics. I discuss below Marchetti's treatment of each theme followed by discussion of the corresponding essays in the book.

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<sup>1</sup> Another recent anthology of essays about Rorty is Randall Auxier, Eli Kramer, and Krzysztof Piotr Skowroński, eds., *Rorty and Beyond* (Lanham, Md, Lexington Books, 2019). For a review of this volume, see Friedman, Robin, "How to Move beyond Rorty?" *Eidos: A Journal for Philosophy of Culture*, vol 4, no.2 (2020), pp. 166-176. <https://doi.org/10.14394/eidos.jpc.2020.0025>.

The first theme is ethics. Marchetti finds that ethics became crucial to Rorty from his studies of philosophical pluralism and pragmatism. Rorty learned from the wonderfully broad pluralism of his philosophical education at Chicago and Yale with teachers including McKeon, Brumbaugh, Carnap, Hempel, Hartshorne, and Weiss. For Marchetti, philosophical pluralism taught Rorty that philosophers had to be honest in the positions they espoused, to take opposing views seriously, and to try to understand the force of positions with which they disagreed. With its emphasis on choice and value in particular situations, pragmatism gave Rorty's philosophy a strongly ethical dimension. Rorty became attracted to a conception of "pragmatism as a philosophical program supported by moral choice." Thus, ethics is the first subject examined in the essays on Rorty's thought in this volume, with the suggestion that it is the driving force in Rorty's work.

The four essays in Part I take Rorty's pragmatism and his commitments to anti-foundationalism, anti-essentialism, and anti-representationalism to explore the objection that Rorty is an ethical relativist for whom "anything goes." The essays show from the beginning the systematic character of Rorty's philosophy, with consideration of his ethics intertwined with his other positions. Thus, in a thoughtful, difficult essay, *Bildung, Unimportance, and Moral Progress*, Sarin Marchetti explores the nature of self-formation in Rorty and of how this project is transformed by the contingency of Rorty's thought, particularly the contingency of the self. In *Rorty as Liberal Ironist Peace Warrior*, Sharyn Clough stresses the "deep and abiding ethical commitments that animate Rorty's work". She argues that Rortian ethics offers a useful basis for the building of human solidarity and rejects the charges of both relativism and dogmatism brought against his "ethnocentrism".

Rorty is shown in dialogue with other thinkers in the remaining two essays in Part I. Raff Donelson's *The Rorty-Dworkin Debate* is the first of three essays considering philosophy of law. Donelson examines the polemics between Rorty and Dworkin and finds that Dworkin's realism is much closer to Rorty's pragmatism than is sometimes supposed. The distinguished philosopher Sabina Lovibond's essay *Philosophy, Literature, Politics: The Cases of Rorty and Collingwood* offers an insightful comparison of the work of these thinkers. In *PMN*, Rorty used his rejection of epistemology and representationalism to develop an "edifying", ethical view of philosophy under which "philosophers' moral concern should be with continuing the conversation of the West." Lovibond draws many parallels with the work of Collingwood, with his skepticism about argument, his historicism, and his view that philosophy was a branch of literature as evidenced by his statement that "the philosopher must go to

school with the poets". Still, she finds that Collingwood differed from Rorty in his belief that, for all its literary character, the work of the philosopher arises out of the search for truth and a search for understanding, historicist as it may be. Lovibond develops the positions of both thinkers and, in my reading, shows more sympathy for the views of Collingwood.

The second theme Marchetti develops in his Introduction is epistemology. In his Introduction to the anthology *The Linguistic Turn* Rorty concluded that the solely analytic approach to philosophy had reached a "dead end" in that it had reformulated but failed to resolve the problems that had plagued philosophy from Descartes through Kant. In his most important book, *PMN*, Rorty identified the primary question driving analytic philosophy as how words "hook onto" the world. Rorty rejected this question and the epistemological assumptions underlying it by a strong attack on representationalism and foundationalism. His attack was strongly influenced by James and Dewey but was also critically influenced by contemporary analytic philosophers, particularly Sellars and Davidson. Philosophers had erred in trying to create a theory "mirroring" nature. Philosophy and knowledge were matters of converging social practices. In the company of Davidson and Sellars, Rorty rejected "scientism" because in addition to the sciences, there were other important ways especially literature, poetry and fiction, of discussing and understanding human concerns. Rorty notoriously rejected epistemological discussions of "truth" on grounds that truth was a property of sentences and not of reality. He rejected representationalism and correspondence, opting instead for an understanding of truth as solidarity.

The five essays in Part II of the book offer probing studies of Rorty's epistemology and his rejection of representationalism and foundationalist metaphysics. For all the importance of the earlier essays on ethics, this group of essays seems to me more important in understanding Rorty. In her essay *What Should Rorty Say about Relativism?* Carol Rovane argues that Rorty had been convinced by Davidson's essay *The Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme* to reject relativism. Most of Rovane's essay consists of a careful analysis of the nature of relativism in Davidson and of the reasons Davidson gave, with which she finds Rorty agreed, for rejecting relativism. Rorty thought that Davidson had disposed of the issue of relativism. Rosa Calcaterra's essay, *Rorty's Reconstruction of Linguistic Pragmatism* carefully examines the "linguistic turn" in Rorty in basing pragmatism on language as opposed to experience. Calcaterra contrasts Rorty's pragmatism at length with the experiential pragmatism of Dewey and James. As with Rovane's essay, Davidson's thought also is shown as

crucial in understanding the manner in which Rorty sees language as a tool for dealing with reality and for countering what Rorty saw as foundationalist tendencies in Dewey's epistemology and metaphysics.

The writings of Rorty scholar Chris Voparil receive substantial attention in this volume. Voparil's own contribution, *Rorty and Experience* explores the seemingly large divide in contemporary pragmatism between Rorty, and his linguistic pragmatism, and Dewey, and an experientially-based pragmatism. Voparil argues that this divide, while important, was exaggerated by polemics by both Rorty and his critics late in his career. In a careful historical essay, Voparil examines the course of Rorty's writings and compares them with the work of Dewey as well as of Peirce. He finds that the language/experience divide is over-stated and that Rorty is able to acknowledge and accept many of the experiential insights of Dewey. Voparil's essay is an admirable illustration of philosophical bridge-building.

In *Richard Rorty, Rocks, and Realism*, Marianne Janack begins with Samuel Johnson's attempt to refute Berkeley by kicking a stone until his foot rebounded from it. She uses this famous alleged refutation to consider Rorty's sharply critical discussion of the philosophical realism of Nobel Prize winning physicist Steven Weinberg who argued, against Kuhn, that scientific laws had the same degree of correspondence to reality as do rocks. Janack finds that Rorty's critique of Weinberg shows a tension in his philosophy between a trivial common-sense realism on the one hand and a criticism of what Rorty sees as the "hegemonic rhetorical power of science which licenses Weinberg's intellectual hubris" on the other hand.

Barry Allen's contribution, *Disepistemology*, offers a bridge between the second and third parts of the book. Allen understands Rorty as moving from his attempted rejection of epistemology in *PMN* to developing a replacement in the form of cultural politics in his later work. While finding much of value in Rorty's critique of representationalism and correspondence, Allen rejects the dilemma posed by Rorty's work between the end of epistemology on the one hand and cultural politics on the other hand. I agree. He sketches a proposed alternative in which the focus on the rationalistic, propositional conception of knowledge is replaced less by cultural politics than by a focus on *techne*. In sum, Allen suggests a way of bridging the gap between ontological adequacy and conversation in thinking philosophically about the theory of knowledge.

We turn to the third part of the book titled Politics. In works subsequent to *PMN*, Rorty showed a growing interest in practical concerns. Marchetti argues that in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, Rorty shifted from epistemology back to ethics, and

to politics, and culture. Rorty uses, in my view, his rejection of traditional epistemology and metaphysics to build a broader philosophical position almost in the manner of traditional system-building. Rorty's later work moves freely between philosophical, political, literary, and cultural issues which, in Marchetti's words, "breaks down the barriers between disciplines and cultures". Rorty's position becomes increasingly complex with his unusual use of terms such as "irony" and "ethnocentrism". For Marchetti, Rorty is a "postmodern liberal" who rejects the ontological and epistemological commitments of the Enlightenment, including the belief in a transhistorical and ahistorical concept of reason and morality, in favor of a historicism and contingency that "go all the way down". This commitment both to Enlightenment and to contingency has different consequences, for Rorty, in what he distinguishes as the personal and political spheres of life.

The five essays in Part III begin with another effort at philosophical dialogue as Michael Bacon and Nat Rutherford examine the longstanding debate between Rorty and Habermas in *Rorty, Habermas, and Radical Social Criticism*. The authors critique Rorty for his frequently professed political liberalism, a commitment of Rorty's which I broadly share. The authors favor a more radical politics. They find support for a more radical position in Rorty by examining his lengthy debate with Habermas. Although Rorty tended to minimize his disagreements with Habermas, the authors believe they are significant. These differences turn on the two philosophers views of the Enlightenment. Unlike Rorty, "Habermas does not think it possible to pull apart the philosophical and the political aspects of the Enlightenment." Habermas, unlike Rorty, remains in this essay a foundationalist thinker committed to metaphysics and to a "natural order of things" in spite of his protestations to the contrary. The authors argue that Rorty's thought remains better suited to a radical politics beyond traditional liberalism. Other recent studies of Rorty and Habermas have seen their philosophies and political goals as much closer.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Milan Kilanowski's recent book, *The Rorty-Habermas Debate: Toward Freedom as Responsibility* (Albany, NY, State University of New York Press, 2021), examines the debate in depth and concludes that the two philosophers are much closer in approach and in conclusions than is sometimes supposed. In particular, for Kilanowski there is a much larger degree of commonality than found in the essay by Bacon and Rutherford. For a review of Kilanowski see Friedman, Robin, "Richard Rorty, Jürgen Habermas, and the Nature of Philosophical Dialogue" *Eidos, A Journal for Philosophy of Culture*, vol 6, no. 1 (2022): 126-131.  
<https://doi.org/10.14394/eidos.jpc.2022.0010>.

Susan Dieleman's contribution *Thinking with Rorty about How to Make Philosophy More Liveable* is a meditation on Rorty's statement "we should let a hundred flowers bloom" in describing the nature of philosophy as it could be. She understands Rorty as recommending a "vision of philosophy that doesn't take itself to be limited by a (or this) problematic, or by a (or this method), but rather as a discipline where (almost) anything goes." Dieleman finds that Rorty's recommendation to "let a hundred flowers bloom" is particularly valuable in approaching the philosophical efforts of diverse, marginalized groups by not holding their thinking to rigid standards of justification established in advance.

The following two essays discuss Rorty and legal philosophy and may be read together with Donelson's essay in Part I on the Rorty-Dworkin debate. As a former lawyer, I found these essays of interest. Beyond rejecting Platonism and legal formalism in favor of pragmatism and offering ill-defined remarks about the "visionary" character of adjudication, Rorty said little about legal philosophy. He left room for substantial conjecture. William Curtis's essay *Poetic Justice? Rorty's Jurisprudence* recognizes that Rorty's work fascinates legal scholars but has little concrete application. I found the essay valuable for its exploration of ways to flesh out Rorty. In particular, Curtis writes insightfully about Richard Posner's critique of Rorty and about the semantic and Hegelian-influenced legal theory offered by Rorty's student and important philosopher in his own right, Robert Brandom. The second essay, Douglas Lind's *Pragmatism and the Mirror of Law* opens with a critique of philosophical pragmatism and its relevance to legal pragmatism offered separately by Rorty, Posner, and Dworkin. The essay then attempts to show the relevance of classical pragmatism to jurisprudence by focusing on an analysis of the concept of *stare decisis* in United States law. Lind states that *stare decisis* "represents the practice of courts to treat principles or rules established in prior cases as binding authority." Much of the essay develops the history and application of *stare decisis* interspersed with discussions of philosophical pragmatism. The essay concludes, rather vaguely and without specific discussion of Rorty that *stare decisis* "is best understood through the lens of classical philosophical pragmatism".

I greatly admire Rorty for *Achieving our Country* and for his patriotism. The volume's concluding essay, Shannon Sullivan's *Achieving Whose Country? Rorty and Baldwin on the United States* takes a different view and is the most critical essay in the book of Rorty. The title of Rorty's *Achieving our Country* alludes to James Baldwin's essay *The Fire Next Time* (1963). Baldwin had written:

"If we -- and now I mean the relatively conscious whites and the relatively conscious blacks, who must, like lovers, insist on, or create the consciousness of the others -- do not falter in our duty now, we may be able, handful that we are, to end the racial nightmare, and achieve our country, and change the history of the world."<sup>3</sup>

Sullivan's essay compares the visions of the United States of Baldwin and Rorty and criticizes Rorty's insufficient recognition of anti-black racism and white supremacy. Her essay offers a wide-ranging critique of Rorty's political and philosophical thought, including his rejection of epistemology, his lack of understanding of the nature of selfhood, his rejection of religion, his distinction between the private and the public spheres in a liberal democracy and more, Sullivan argues that Rorty fails to understand Baldwin, concluding that "the new identity to be forged for the nation is one that remakes the selves of white people rather than one that encourages them to neglect race." I think it desirable to find more of a convergence between Rorty and Baldwin. Still, Sullivan's provocative essay makes a fitting conclusion to this volume considering the ethics, epistemology, and politics of Richard Rorty.

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<sup>3</sup> Baldwin, James, "The Fire Next Time", in *Collected Essays*, (Toni Morrison, ed), New York, NY, Library of America, pp. 286 - 347.



BOOK REVIEW:  
THE RORTY-HABERMAS DEBATE

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Marcin Kilanowski,  
*The Rorty-Habermas Debate: Toward Freedom as Responsibility* Albany, NY:  
SUNY Press, 2020, 304 pages,  
ISBN: 978-1438483559 (Hardcover: \$95.00)



It is a delightful oddity to see lines of agreement sketched out in a time of increasing polarization. That is why philosophers will find Marcin Kilanowski's fresh study reconsidering Richard Rorty and Jurgen Habermas' two-decades long debate a welcoming and timely endeavor.<sup>1</sup> *The Rorty-Habermas Debate: Toward Freedom as Responsibility (RDH)* presents the exchange between Habermas and Rorty by challenging us to rethink their differences as points of *convergence* and pragmatic merging, especially in attempting to regain trust and confidence in democracy. Kilanowski argues that Dewey's social and political philosophy is the "peculiar anchor" and "common root" serving as "a background for reconstructing the life-forms that are characterized by attributing an important role to individual freedom and communication devoid of violence, as presented by Rorty and by Habermas" (*RHD*, 12-13). In the name of freedom, he argues that all three thinkers converge on a functional or practical level by "dethroning absolute truths" (*RHD*, 208). Our responsibility to freedom starts with ridding ourselves of any loyalty to representations and foundations. Using "freedom as responsibility" for the foil of liberal democracy, Kilanowski relies upon Dewey's influence making a persuasive case, forcing us to scratch the surface and go beyond the conventional borders of debate between two of the most important philosophers of the twentieth century.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Kilanowski summarizes the debate accordingly: "This exchange concerned fundamental philosophical issues: the nature of reality, the status of truth, the understanding of modernity, and the universality of philosophical concepts, as well as the implications of these for the issues of freedom, democracy, and the present and future of liberal societies. Adversaries have often emphasized the mutual sympathy of the two philosophers, personal and philosophical, as well as the fact that they do not differ much in practical terms, in particular, regarding the social and political consequences of their positions. Their discussion took the form of a dialogue between the great philosophical traditions of European continental philosophy represented by Habermas, with particular emphasis on critical theory, and the tradition of American pragmatism represented by Rorty" (*RHD*, 8).

<sup>2</sup> Kilanowski concludes his book with an eschatological tone of hope, writing: "in other words, it is the popularization of Dewey's, Habermas', and Rorty's perspectives that determines the emergence of a world in which the Orwellian boot shall not stomp on a human face forever. And when I speak of popularization, I mean the dissemination of those elements of their philosophies that are connected with pointing to the need of existence of conditions for undistorted communication based

He lists “numerous similarities” and points “of convergence within pragmatist sociopolitical thought” between Habermas, Rorty, and Dewey. Both thinkers find Dewey’s focus on education, civic engagement, and radical democracy constructive for our liberal society. This is not surprising given that Dewey’s legacy seems to be a pivotal hue for passing the necessary threshold of philosophical acceptance, especially in Euro-American tradition. We would be remiss not to highlight that arguably everyone seems to call upon Dewey. For example, thinkers as divergent as Hilary Putnam and Rorty appropriated Dewey for their own philosophical projects. As Dewey expert John Shook recognizes, Rorty has been repeatedly accused of “trivializing Dewey” in unhelpful ways, to say nothing of Habermas. I think it is a real stretch to consider Dewey a precursor of Rorty’s neo-pragmatism or postmodernism, but readers will have to examine Kilanowski’s case on its own merits. Undoubtedly, both thinkers work to convince readers that pragmatism should be seen as a strong philosophical influence.

One gets the impression from Kilanowski’s argument that Rorty’s quest to dethrone philosophy and replace it with democracy is as scientifically systematic of an endeavor as the tradition of Habermas, Luhmann, and Giddens. No effort, however, to establish a theoretical framework underlies Rorty’s philosophical project. It may be the case that “[p]hilosophy and democracy are both dependent on freedom, apart from the fact that they emerge from the same historical context” (*RDH*, 193). What are we to do with this freedom? I agree with Kilanowski that Rorty and Habermas converge on the point that only pragmatism “builds upon the spirit of radical democracy in a convincing way,” but Habermas only pursues this half-heartedly or with the aim of preserving the “very purpose of Western philosophy.” Rorty’s sociopolitical thought starts from the position that any weddedness to tradition be abandoned, especially given that we have an obligation to create “new vocabularies.” Readers have to decide how big of a deal we should make out of this (lack of) allegiance to the heritage of Western philosophy. However, in Rorty’s own words he makes clear what he viewed as the “interesting” point of departure from Habermas’s project, which is the need for idealistic validation: “As I see it, the only serious or interesting disagreement between Habermas and myself is about whether you need notions like ‘unconditionality’ and ‘universal validity’ in order to justify social democratic institutions.”

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upon such values as equality of parties in dialogue and based on freedom” (*RHD*, 210).

The most devastating piece of Rorty's neo-pragmatism shows how—*ironically*—undemocratic it is in its conceptual reliance on solidarity as ethnocentric.<sup>3</sup> Joseph Margolis's sharp analysis explains how "Rorty thinks of 'our' community as no more than a collection of individuals that we, *privately*, admire or wish to adhere to, that may be entirely fictionally constructed, idiosyncratically projected. He never entertains the question of just how we are able to *construct* this or that harmonious vision in the first place or how we are ever to *know* that we *are* actually adhering to its would-be norms."<sup>4</sup> Habermas' communicative philosophy, arguably, sets consensus as its main objective in a way that Rorty's philosophy takes to be superficial. On the other hand, despite rejecting any objectivist and universalist criteria, Habermas still focuses on what Zygmunt Bauman saw at the heart of modernity: the need to categorize, domesticate, and rationalize (Max Weber's "iron cage") the world to make it predictable and controllable. Such pretensions lie at the heart of the underlying need to create and secure rational or "communicative" competence.

What the debate between Habermas and Rorty confirms is what philosophers should keep in mind: that labels are cheap substitutes for the real thing and don't disclose the depth of the interpretation, nor articulate the complexity of their points of agreement and disagreement. As a way of avoiding the charge of relativism, Rorty continually revised his position on how to go about rejecting the view that there is a certain way that things are. He is adamant that the world does not have to be the way it is and we need not endorse a pessimistic outlook on the future. Rarely will one find a self-proscribed relativist turning to progress and social hope in the manner that Rorty takes these up. As Richard Bernstein writes in *The Pragmatic Turn*, "Many of the classical Kantian distinctions—noumena/phenomena, appearance/things-in-itself, understanding/sensibility—are no longer acceptable as they were originally developed by Kant. Habermas rejects Kant's transcendental idealism (as well as Hegel's absolute idealism) in favor of a post-Kantian and post-Hegelian *epistemological*

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<sup>3</sup> Hall notes how "It is not the radical theorists but the liberal Rorty who recognizes that a central strength of the ethnocentric bourgeois liberal's inventory lies in its tools for the critique of ethnocentrism. Likewise, Rorty realizes that there is a consensus among Western liberalism to the effect that we ought to suspect consensus. The theorists narrow that consensus by seeking its essential character; they make their ethnocentrism dangerous by presuming to take objective, universal, 'God's-eye' view of things." (110).

<sup>4</sup> Joseph Margolis, *Interpretation Radical but Not Unruly: The New Puzzle of the Arts and History*, 240, emphasis original.

*realism*.”<sup>5</sup> Bernstein finds Habermas’s treatment of truth problematic since he fails to justify his claim that it is “unconditional” or beyond justification. Despite Rorty’s tendency to “dismiss and/or trivialize the very idea of truth,”<sup>6</sup> even Kilanowski quotes Rorty as arguing that “for those living in this democratic utopia [Deweyan-inspired democracy], ‘tolerance and curiosity, rather than truth-seeking, are the chief intellectual virtues’” (*RHD*, 47).

Both philosophers are concerned with language and linguistic usage contributing to our overall social conditions and institutions that make up our cultures. However, Rorty is concerned with exposing the abuses of “truth” and checking any pretensions toward preserving it. Habermas and Rorty assume free speech or exchange of ideas without fear of reprisal. Philosophically speaking, both think from a perspective of privilege despite downplaying the significance of such privilege through the rhetoric of relativity, diversity, and mutual respect. In Rorty’s case, the function of language occurs at the level of edifying conversation, while Habermas develops a communicative theory as a means for establishing objective validity on which social and political consensus can be justified for making our claims. Rorty refuses to accept Habermas’s conviction that the values of modern enlightenment and rationality can be rehabilitated or reformed in ways that will aid our democratic hopes and ideals. While Habermas believes in the project of modernity more than Rorty, both emphasize communicative action or “edifying discourses” as fundamental to the wellbeing of social processes. But such a focus on final vocabularies and rationality seems to only deal with the syntax and semantics of social structures. It does not get to the questions of worth and value, levels of harmony and intensity. Neither thinker avoids the charge that the philosophy of language is limited since it reduces cultural and philosophical meaning, falling into the marching orders of a linguistic positivism. Interpretation is a wider form of experience in the making and receiving of meaning. A philosophy of interpretation includes but is not exhausted by communication, verbal language, and meaning-making. As Robert Neville writes about the basic difference between pragmatism and the linguistic turn, “To some extent, at least, what we experience is to be understood and grasped in terms of what we say about it. Nevertheless the saying is different from the experiencing.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Richard J. Bernstein, *The Pragmatic Turn*. Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2010, 170-171, emphasis added.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 191.

<sup>7</sup> Neville, *Recovery of the Measure*, 1989, 263.

In the end it may come down to the disagreement regarding how far apart these thinkers are. Could it be the case that Rortyan shrugs are the same as Habermasian *yeses* and *nos*? Václav Havel the former president of Czechoslovakia, philosopher and writer made the claim that “the only genuine backbone of all our actions, if they are to be moral, is responsibility—responsibility to something higher than my family, my country, my company, my success.” With Kilanowski’s reading of Rorty and Habermas the backbone of our moral actions becomes freedom.

Neither author takes seriously the tension inherent within disagreements and issues surrounding cultural appropriation and assimilation. Habermas, similar to a Rawlsian approach, is more of a “careful” universalist who wants to give a sound defense of modern reason, whereas Rorty simply admits we will never overcome our local provincialisms and prejudices. Both thinkers *dramatize* the extreme which is how they were able to manage to frame a significant philosophical debate in the first place. What scholars like Kilanowski miss is how both desperately seek to cultivate a middle-way between these extremes and ultimately fail to do so because, for better and for worse, each is wrapped up in the progressive mission statement of modernity. In our world of *mixtures* and what Bauman famously called “liquid modernity,” Rorty and Habermas give the impression of being social, political, and cultural *purists* who think that one can find an ideal position, whether along the scale of lonely provincialism or communicative rationality. In a non-cynical and non-pessimistic way, we can reject such aims as pretentious and detrimental to the impact that philosophy can have and make. One may agree that Habermas and Rorty converge, but not for the reasons that Kilanowski lays out. Both are overly concerned about modernity—Habermas’s efforts to preserve it, Rorty’s goal to suppress it—and, in this, they speak on behalf of western civilization and Eurocentrism. Each professes, in his own way, how to preserve the western Eurocentric way of life whether one is thinking in the provincial or universalist vein. Only in the abstract, or with a nod to political correctness, do we find them open to other cultures and ways of life that may compromise or, in the very least, challenge one’s conception of “undistorted communication” or ironic contingency in the empirically concrete sense. However, readers may share the limitations which Bauman expresses about falling into fundamentalisms despite wanting to avoid them. Perhaps a solid case can be made that Habermas and Rorty represent low-key fundamentalisms of the postmodern kind, the former in the mode of consensus over the appraisal of the results and the latter through his local provincialism and ethnocentrism. From a Baumanian interpretation, it may be fair to criticize Rorty and Habermas for relying too heavily

upon older modes of thinking and language, namely Deweyan democracy, in order to grapple with a liquid modernity requiring new philosophical concepts and languages. The future may force us to think beyond Habermas and Rorty, without abandoning their philosophical enterprises completely.

When Rorty characterized Habermas as “a liberal who is unwilling to be an ironist” and Foucault as “an ironist unwilling to be a liberal,” the key was not only to find common ground on the sociopolitical front but to appreciate the efficacy of irony as well. Irony is one of the important tropes most underappreciated and neglected by modern philosophers—it’s one of the reasons that Rorty’s philosophy is disillusioned by the grand projects of modernity in a way that Habermas’s doesn’t seem to be. Readers may be disappointed in Kilanowski’s treatment of irony and how far of a distance this leaves Habermas from Rorty. A decisive point of departure from Habermas that Rorty takes is abandoning the social hope, ironically, of ever settling upon a *functionally* final vocabulary. As Kilanowski notes about the liberal ironist: “Her final vocabulary is not final, nor does it describe something accurately. It is characterized as final, as its users cannot refer to anything outside it if the words within it are challenged. She uses it to justify her own beliefs and desires. While justifying, the ironist faces contingency, all the time being aware that the words she uses to describe her own self are subject to change. She remembers, then, about the fragility and contingency of her final vocabulary and of herself” (*RHD*, 41). Within Rorty’s reworked conception of identity, humans are nothing but “webs of beliefs and desires,” which points to the fact that there is a strong element of *contingency* underlying all of our social and cultural activities. Rorty disregards issues involving consensus and is more concerned with finding ways to critique or challenge what is taken to be any final vocabulary of the status quo. “With due respect, however, to Heidegger and the pragmatists (and the later Wittgenstein), Richard Rorty has spoken the priestly word for the triumph of interpretation: reality can be dismissed as the stuff mind was falsely thought to mirror, and culture’s quest for truth is simply an ongoing conversation, hopefully edifying” (Neville 1989, 27).

Kilanowski makes a compelling case that we should question the supposed differences between Habermas and Rorty. It is refreshing to read one philosophizing who is pushing us toward common ground, emphasizing cooperation over polarization. With that being said, however, it will be difficult for readers to overlook or downplay the fact that Rorty and Habermas appear to occupy two different modernity’s. One which still finds hope in the processes of rationalization and one that abandons such projects as futile. While both thinkers commit themselves to

ameliorating the suffering plight of others neither adequately addresses why we continue to witness, even in the age of democracy (whether blooming or in its twilight), the perpetual flourishing of non-innocents.



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BOOK REVIEW:  
PRAGMATISM'S EVOLUTION

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Trevor Pearce,  
*Pragmatism's Evolution: Organism and Environment  
in American Philosophy*  
Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020. xiv+367 pp.  
ISBN: 978-0226719917 (Paperback: \$35.00)



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*Pragmatism's Evolution* is the result of a thorough archival investigation of the many connections between early Pragmatism and nineteenth and early twentieth century evolutionary theory. This archival work yields an institutional history of early Pragmatism, for Pearce's work carefully considers how the Pragmatists' courses of study and the teachers who taught them shaped their work. While the book focuses on how the conceptual and experimental landscape of biology and related sciences were reshaped as a result of the Darwinian earthquake, this approach can be likened to that of a *Bildungsroman*: Pearce shows us how four of key figures of Pragmatism became the thinkers they were through their engagements with the biological sciences of the day, first as students and then as thinkers in their own right.

Pearce focuses on Peirce, James, and Dewey, but not exclusively. While his research on these three thinkers sheds new light even on this comparatively well-trod ground, he expands the cast of characters to include thinkers who are less well-known through a focus on educational cohorts. Looking at where Pragmatists were educated and who taught them provides valuable clues for understanding these thinkers, ones that will no doubt prove valuable for future researchers. And, following Cornel West, Pearce expands the circle of Pragmatists to discuss the role of nineteenth and twentieth century evolutionary biology in the work of Jane Adams, W.E.B. Du Bois, and George Herbert Mead.

Scholars have long noted the influence of evolutionary thinking on the Pragmatists, though it is often assumed that Darwin's evolutionary theory provides the touchstone here. Pearce shows that this is largely mistaken: while reflection on Darwin's theory of natural selection is present, we get a distorted view of the role that evolution plays in early Pragmatism if we focus solely on Darwin. Much more significant for Peirce, James, and Dewey is the work of Herbert Spencer and August Weismann. It would be worth reading if it only made the case for Spencer and Weismann as the key thinkers informing the early Pragmatists' engagements with evolutionary biology. But the book does much more. Changing the focus from Darwin to Spencer in particular can help us to better see the significance of evolution for Pragmatism in its early years. Pearce focuses on the years 1860-1910 because it is during these years that the Pragmatists' engagement with evolutionary thinking is most pronounced, though key terms such as "environment," "experiment," and "habit" derived their meaning in least in part through their engagement with evolutionary thought and Spencer's thought in particular, and of course these terms remain significant long after 1910.

The book's first chapter examines how members of The Metaphysical Club made sense of Darwin's *Origin of Species* shortly after its publication in 1859 before turning to a consideration of Spencer's challenge to Darwin's account of adaptation through natural selection in Chapter Two. The third chapter turns to the second generation of Pragmatists in order to show how evolutionary theory was taught, with a particular focus on how it affected graduate education in philosophy and related fields toward the end of the nineteenth century. The fourth chapter turns to Hegel and evolution, while the fifth chapter explores the work of a thinker even less well-known than Spencer, namely the German biologist August Weismann. The final two chapters explore how Pragmatist theories of ethics and logic were formulated through this encounter with evolutionary thought.

Darwin's *Origin of Species* was published in 1859, and Pearce shows how Darwin influenced the first cohort of Pragmatists including Peirce and James as well as older members such as Chauncey Wright. The most influential naturalist in the United States from the mid-nineteenth century into 1870s was Louis Agassiz, a staunch opponent of evolution. Although Agassiz acknowledged biological change, he denied that this change could have come about naturally; it required divine intervention. The young Peirce and James were students of Agassiz as well as members of the loosely-organized Metaphysical Club. Peirce studied with Agassiz briefly but during a period when Agassiz was formulating his critique of natural selection in the mid-1860s. During this period, James came to identify himself as a naturalist and studied with Agassiz while closely reading *The Origin of Species* (41). James finally judged Agassiz a brilliant naturalist but "close-minded and biased when it came to evolution" while serving as a member of Agassiz' Amazonian expedition in 1865 (44-45). Here he sided with the more members of The Metaphysical Club such as Chauncey Wright and John Fiske who published philosophical critiques of Agassiz and his allies arguing that evolutionary change was immanent to nature (49).

Pearce next recovers Herbert Spencer's thought and shows the profound influence his thought exerted on Pragmatists during this period. Mostly forgotten today, Spencer was once thought to have been the "greatest Englishman since Shakespeare" (cited on p. 58). Spencer argued that evolutionary change was a function of environmental factors, a view Peter Godfrey-Smith has dubbed "externalism" (73). James in particular argued against Spencer's externalism, since it rendered individual organisms passive and minds simply the products of environmental factors (77). While he certainly did not deny the role that environmental factors play in evolution,

he thought that individuals could shape their environment. More specifically, James sought to replace Spencer's organism-environment model with a model that included a third term, interests. "That is, subjective interests--whether innate or acquired--inevitably shape our experience. Whereas we marvel at the sculpted agony of Laocoon, dogs care only for 'the odors at the bases of the pedestals.'" Spencer's theory, said James, could not explain this difference (81). And it is individual consciousness that determines interests for James (83).

The third chapter looks at the teaching of natural history in the schools where the second cohort of Pragmatists pursued their graduate education and shows that by the 1880s most courses were taught by proponents of evolution. Jane Addams, George Herbert Mead, and W.E.B. Du Bois were all taught natural history by teachers who sought to reconcile evolution and religion. They did not simply accept their teachers' accounts but also sought to understand more materialist accounts of evolution, and by the time this second cohort of Pragmatists became teachers in the 1880s and 1890s, philosopher had begun to consider Spencer's externalist account of evolution. Second cohort pragmatists sought to augment Spencer's theory by turning to idealism, thereby formulating "a dialectical account of the organism-environment relation" (157).

Unlike later twentieth century interpreters of Pragmatism, Dewey and Mead saw Hegel and Darwin as part of a broader return to history. "Thus for Dewey, Hegel's dialectic was part of a broader nineteenth-century obsession with history, growth, and evolution" (167). On their account, the organism and environment comprise a dialectical relationship coordinated in a single process of life and experience (179-180).

The fifth chapter undercuts this identification of the pragmatists as evolutionary idealists by turning to the vexing problem of biological factors and their role in biological variation. What exactly are the factors of evolution, and is natural selection sufficient to account for biological variation? German biologist August Weismann distinguishes three factors that account for evolution, including "direct action of the medium," "natural selection," and "modifications of structure caused by modifications of function." Spencer thought these three factors corresponded to three different phases, with the first being key for the development of single-celled organisms and the second for more complex organisms. The third factor was most important for higher-order animals such as humans; it was the Lamarckian factor (201). Weismann denied Lamarckian inheritance of acquired traits and was hence dubbed Neo-Darwinian. Today we tend to think of Lamarckian accounts of evolution

as dead-letters, but certainly was not the case in the 1880s. Indeed, Peirce's account of habit derives in part from a consideration of Lamarck. "According to Peirce, Lamarck's was a 'third method' of evolution that, in good Hegelian fashion, 'superseded' the opposition of these other two while retaining their important aspects. Central to this method was 'habit-taking,' the action of which is 'essentially dissimilar to that of a physical force; and that is the secret of the repugnance of such necessitarians as Weismann to demitting its existence.'" (221, citing "Evolutionary Love"). Pearce shows how Dewey responded to the Spencer-Weismann debate of the 1890s by adopting a dialectical account of the organism-environment relation and an anarchist politics. If Weismann is wrong and there are other (Lamarckian) factors in addition to natural selection, then social progress becomes possible because present generations can inherit and build upon past cultures. If natural selection is the only factor, then social decline becomes inevitable once the struggle for existence ceases (235). However the struggle for existence could serve as an engine for social progress, it is this view that Dewey continues to espouse, which brings him closer to Weismann than Jane Addams, who believed that Spencerian social harmony was the key to progress (241).

The final two chapters of Pearce's study take him away from the pragmatists' direct debates about evolution in order to consider how evolutionary theory impacts their accounts of ethics and logic. Pragmatism espouses an experimentalism that derives from their engagement with the biological sciences of their time. Ethics, psychology, and logic are all different forms of experimentalism.

This rich study should provide the starting point for future researchers interested in the connections between the early pragmatists and the biological sciences of their day. But it does much more: it places the key pragmatist thinkers within various intellectual contexts and reminds us of the importance of thinkers such as Herbert Spencer and August Weismann for understanding evolutionary theories at the end of the nineteenth century. Whereas most accounts of Pragmatism and evolution focus on Darwin, Pearce reminds us that evolutionary theory was very much a debate during this period, and the terms of the debate shaped Pragmatism in ways that Pearce's book helps us to better understand.