

JOHN DEWEY AND THE EDUCATION OF THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

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“A public school system, if it means the providing of free education for those who desire it, is a noteworthy and beneficent achievement of modern times; but when it once becomes monopolistic it is the most perfect instrument of tyranny which has yet been devised...Place the lives of children in their formative years, despite the convictions of their parents, under the intimate control of experts appointed by the state, force them then to attend schools where the higher aspirations of humanity are crushed out, and where the mind is filled with the materialism of the day, and it is difficult to see how even the remnants of liberty can subsist. Such a tyranny, supported as it is by a perverse technique used as the instrument in destroying human souls, is certainly far more dangerous than the crude tyrannies of the past, which despite their weapons of fire and sword permitted thought at least to be free.”

-J. Gresham Machen¹

¹ J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: 1992 Reprint), pp. 13-14.

Historical Essay

In 1894 the influential American philosopher John Dewey began the Chicago Laboratory School to learn how to educate children in an environment for testing on “how children learn best.”

Although a pragmatic philosopher, influenced by William James of Harvard, Dewey tried his best to subjectively test each student in order to find “what is the best way to educate” according to the results gathered from the learning of the students.

In all areas of learning such as history, mathematics, science, literature, language, and so forth. What had classically been taught in American education was subjected to the child’s gathering of the knowledge. The objective knowledge of these particular subjects was no longer seen as being a goal to be obtained in the intellectual realm, but in a progressive, pluralistic culture, education was subjected to testing so that the very ideas that had been formed in history to inform the mind so that we can better understand, even this was subjected to testing.

But how can we all really know taken these individual topics of education and try to examine them, this presupposes not only that the fact that we have education in order to think this way, but we must be able to define what each particularly branch of education consists. Dewey’s educational philosophy was called “Pragmatic Instrumentalism” and it was designed to give the most effective education to the most number of people in America in the shortest possible time. It was very “American” in the sense that not only did the philosophy of William James support it and give it life, but it was also concerned with being timely. This was a progressive era at the end of the 19th century that was seeing America grow in population like never before in her history. Between the period of 1900-1920, 19 million immigrants were coming to America of many differing religious and cultural backgrounds. This brought an awareness to new religions and ethnicity.

By 1920, the United States put a limit on immigration in the Emergency Quota Act (1921). Historian Paul Johnson writes: “...The Emergency Quota Act of 1921, first passed in 1920, pocket-vetoed by Wilson, reenacted and reluctantly signed by Harding. It capped immigration from Europe at 357,000 a year, though it set no limits on Canada or Latin America. This was the first statutory

ceiling on immigration...As a result, European immigration to the US fell from 2,477,853 in the 1920s to 348,289 in the 1930s, and total immigration from 4,107,200 to 528,400. The era of unrestricted mass immigration was over.”²

There was an effort to make America safe for her own Democracy and to “Americanize” immigrants with the same mindset and goals as everyone else in the country. America’s great fear since 1850 was that it would be overturned with another false religion or that many ignorant, poor cultural people would take away our “National agenda” at conformity. Without a national church, or a religious denomination that was specific to many Americans, it was thought in this progressive time that education would be one of the solutions to many of the problems. This would give every American an opportunity to know and this belief was also built into the thought of being a better society than the remainder of the world. If all were taught the same education information what could be better. This and the German philosophy of education in specialized topics would not spiritually educate as an end in itself, but it would be a utilitarian education in most people’s minds and the goal would be the position in society that could be obtained more than the fact that they were more well-rounded because of this education.

Dewey envisioned an education that would be effective to everyone. His disciples did not need to know exactly what they were learning, as long as they *were* learning. He applied a scientific method to produce an atmosphere that would be most conducive to the student’s learning atmosphere. In 1909, Dewey published a work entitled *How we Think*. In this work he argued for the process of argumentation, thinking process with experimentation, and problem solving. His educational philosophy was to get people to be educated according to giving them a problem, allowing them to identify the problem and offer a solution, then work through until they provide their own solution. It was not a mere lecturing; of people sitting under a professor teaching while they are note-taking

² Paul Johnson, *A History of the American People* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1998), pg. 670.

and memorizing ideas. Instead, this was hopefully to produce new ideas, ideas that the depths were yet to be plumbed.³

This new philosophy of Dewey historically arrived with the ascendancy of Modernism. Modernism is a difficult term to try to describe. However, it is an important term to understand at the end the nineteenth century when John Dewey would be such an influential person. Basically, Modernism is anti-supernatural in its belief system at the foundation. It is not necessarily atheistic in its claims, because when tied with American civil religion of morality and education, it can posit a God with no objections. As a movement, it occurred in the progressive, secular culture as well as in the Church in the form of Liberalism and the Social Gospel. Outside the church it was a belief in *Homo mensura* or “man the measure.” It believed that truth could be deduced rationally and that humans needed education and right moral principles to produce a united, grand society with roots in democracy, disconnected with the past history, in an individualistic way with a promise for the future of humanity (cultural modernism).

In the Church, in the form of Liberalism and the Social Gospel (theological modernism) it was a belief that humanity had matured, particularly regarding religion, and man did not need to accept all the claims of Scripture, nor the supernatural teachings that it presented. In fact, a relationship to God and his Son Jesus could be obtained through love of God and an experience of what God has done in the history of religions, particularly Christianity. It was not mere dogmas, facts, and historical truths, Modernism and Liberalism posited that it was an experience of God that was needful.

³ Historian D. G. Hart writes: “[J. Gresham Machen] criticized pragmatic defenses of Christianity. ‘It is no proof of the absolute truth of Christianity,’ he wrote, ‘that it has made the world better: for that achievement it shares perhaps with other religions, though no doubt they have it in far less degree.’ Rather than revealing antagonistic conceptions of science and truth, Protestant debates over evolution manifested significant differences over the nature and purpose of Christianity. Liberal Protestantism reflected the widening influence of the social sciences and of a functional approach to religious ideas. This development was tied to efforts to construct a scientific rationale for many of the values that Protestants held dear and to implement those ideals in society. Religious or philosophical truth did not conform to a fixed and abstract reality but developed out of practical and daily experience. John Dewey’s understanding of religions in *A Common Faith* (1934) expressed in less Christian terms the impulse that lay behind religious modernism. Like liberal Protestantism, Dewey wanted to emancipate religion from dogma and to infuse human affairs traditionally regarded as secular with religious qualities. To be sure, Dewey was critical of Protestantism and was uncomfortable with theology and the church as outlets for religious experience. Still, Dewey agreed with the ‘crucial contention’ of religious modernism that the traditional disjunction between the sacred and the secular or between the church and society was invalid.” D. G. Hart, *Defending the Faith: J. Gresham Machen and the Crisis of Conservative Protestantism in Modern America* (Grand Rapids, MI: 1995), pp. 100-101.

This Liberal tendency in the Church joined in the crusade against the many immigrants and “evils” in America to bring education, morals and through the cleaning-up of society, the kingdom of God on earth. The Modernism within the Church was wed to American civil religion, so it mattered not whether you practiced your “faith” within the church, or without. Historian D. G. Hart writes concerning cultural modernism in America: “The modern outlook of the early twentieth century, most historians and literary scholars concede, featured a frank recognition that the world and our experience of it are never fixed or complete but forever haunted by flux and uncertainty. According to Daniel Joseph Singal, the modernist worldview begins with the premise of ‘an unpredictable universe’ where nothing is stable and human knowledge is ‘partial and transient at best.’ In such a universe, absolute systems must make way for values that adapt continuously to ‘changing historical circumstances.’ In sum, modernists wanted ‘to know *reality* in all its depth and complexity,’ even as they recognized that such knowledge ended in paradox or pain.”⁴

Historian William Hutchison defined Modernism as: ““Modernism, like fundamentalism and most other –isms, was understood and defined in varying (though usually not contradictory) ways, and I do not present my own definition as the only one possible. I have found, however, that when “modernism” finally became a common term in the early part of this century, it generally meant three things: first...it meant the conscious, intended adaptation of religious ideas to modern culture. The popular or journalistic definition tended to stop there, or to move directly from there to a functional explanation of modernism as the direct opposite and negation of biblical literalism. But for the Protestant theologians, preachers, and teachers who either championed or opposed the idea of cultural adaptation, two further and deeper notions were important. One was the idea that God is immanent in human cultural development and revealed through it. The other was a belief that

⁴ D. G. Hart, *Defending the Faith: J. Gresham Machen and the Crisis of Conservative Protestantism in Modern America* (Grand Rapids, MI: 1995), pg. 6.

human society is moving toward realization (even though it may never attain the reality) of the Kingdom of God.”⁵

In light of the time period in which John Dewey lived as foundational to later American history, America was rapidly changing toward a more “progressive” nature which was intimately related to Modernism and therefore Americans had to be educated according to new principles. Gone were the days of taking objective truth that was passed from previous generations and was communicated anew to those of the present generation. Dewey’s educational ideas were based not on objective truth coming from an absolute and personal God, but ideas based on the individual themselves. It was not “facts” that those being educated needed, it was to get in touch with their own specialties, their own unique identities and what they were truly interested in learning.⁶ Dewey wrote and communicated through all of the ninety-three years of his life and left behind a legacy that has yet to be fully judged in light of his ideas.

John Dewey’s influence on education in a progressive society was tremendous. According to Daniel Boorstin, “John Dewey, a Vermonter who had studied under [G. Stanley] Hall at Johns Hopkins, was to be the most influential American educationist and the most representative American philosopher of the twentieth century. Dewey lived to be ninety-three and he influenced American life until the very end. He left scores of books on every subject, from art and logic and language and morals to manual training, politics, and foreign policy. His writings are colloquial and pedantic, lucid and obscure, easy and unintelligible. Although few would deny that he was America’s leading philosopher, many philosophers, with good reason, called him an anti-philosopher. While he was the

⁵ William R. Hutchison, *The Modernist Impulse in American Protestantism* (Cambridge, MS: Harvard University Press, 1976), pg. 2.

⁶ “Dewey began by thinking of the individual learner as using his mind instrumentally to solve various problems presented by his environment, and went on to develop a theory of education conceived as the growth of the learner. The modern educational system, he says, must operate in an age of democracy, science, and industrialism; education should strive to meet the requirements of this age. Above all, education should abandon those practices, based upon a pre-democratic and pre-industrial society, which accepted the leisured and aristocratic view that knowledge is the contemplation of fixed verities. Dewey felt that he and his contemporaries must now surmount a series of artificial dualisms inherited from past ages. Primary among these was the dualism between knowledge and action. For Dewey, action is involved in knowledge—not in the sense, as some of his uncomprehending critics charged, that knowledge is subordinated to action and inferior to ‘practice,’ but in the sense that knowledge is a form of action, and that action is one of the terms by which knowledge is acquired and used.” Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (New York, NY: 1963), pp. 362-363.

nation's leading apostle of education, some respected educators called him the leading American enemy of education."⁷

What was the effect of John Dewey's theory of education regarding Christianity? Was Christianity antithetical to his thoughts and the foundation on which they were founded? Was there a possibility of synthesis between the two? How would Christianity define true education and what role does the teacher and student take in a truly Christian education? These questions of Dewey's influence and method lead us to a closer look at his "credo" and the beliefs which he held. If he is indeed the most influential philosopher of education, and arguably he is, it is important for Christians to not only be aware of the man and his philosophy, but just how it Christianity is different, if it is.

The following is a dialogue formulated to interact with John Dewey's beliefs from his own writings. Although he wrote a great amount in his ninety-three years, the debate will be centered around his most important representative writings, including *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education*,⁸ *Moral Principles in Education*,⁹ and a *Festschrift*, entitled *The Philosophy of John Dewey*¹⁰, edited by Paul A. Schilpp, dedicated to John Dewey on his eightieth birthday (Oct. 20, 1939). Also an important article in *School Journal*,¹¹ entitled "My Pedagogic Creed" written by him in 1897, is very representative of John Dewey for Dewey describes his "creed" in five articles, defining: I. What Education Is, II. What the School Is, III. The Subject-Matter of Education, IV. The Nature of Method, and V. The School and Social Progress.¹²

⁷ Daniel Boorstin, *The Americans: The Democratic Experiment* (New York, NY: 1973), pg. 496.

⁸ John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (New York, NY: 1920).

⁹ John Dewey, *Moral Principles in Education: Philosophical Library* (New York, NY:1959).

¹⁰ Paul Arthur Schilpp, *The Philosophy of John Dewey, The Library of Living Philosophers, Vol. I* (Chicago, IL.: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1939).

¹¹ John Dewey, "My Pedagogic Creed," *School Journal* 54 (January 16, 1897): 77-80.

¹² "In 1896, Ossian H. Lang, editor of the *School Journal* conceived of the idea of trying to get the most eminent educators to write their own version of a "pedagogic creed" to be published. He said, "There is something radically and fatally wrong with a teacher who has no educational creed...Education is a responsible and complicated work, which must be carefully planned from beginning to end. There must be a definite aim and a clear understanding of the ways and means of reaching it. In other words, the educator must have in his mind some fixed principles in action...The above was in an effort to work out a set of principles that all American educators could follow based on the principles of the foremost experts in education. One of the persons that wrote a "pedagogic creed" was a young psychologist who had combined the departments of philosophy, psychology, and education at the University of Chicago in 1894, named John Dewey. Dewey would found the Laboratory School in 1896 at the University of Chicago to test the "creed" which he described." Quoted in Daniel J. Boorstin, ed., *An American Primer* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1966), pg. 608.

The Christian that will dialog will represent Reformed Christianity, using true Reformed apologetics, and the response to Dewey's thought and philosophy. The Christian's ideas on education will be drawn mainly from the following texts: *Essays on Christian Education* by Cornelius Van Til, *Education, Christianity and the State* by J. Gresham Machen, *A Christian Philosophy of Education* by Gordon H. Clark, *The End of Education: Redefining the Value of School* by Neil Postman, *The Soul of the American University* by George Marsden, *Religion and American Education: Rethinking A National Dilemma* by Warren A. Nord, and *On Secular Education* by Robert Lewis Dabney.

The dialog is very important because of the time when the government of the United States controls the majority of education today and that they have disconnected education from any thoughts about God and Christianity. It is their attempt to redefine what it means to educate, because it is impossible as will be seen the Christian's argument to remove God and Christianity and have any thought or education at all.¹³ With this great secularization of education, using John Dewey's theories, there is absolutely no way for anyone to know anything. With the State in control of most education, it is feared that not only is our country in great trouble as a republic but that Christianity's influence itself has been denied even relevance in a pluralistic culture. Now is the time to engage in a dialog with, what will be argued, a very formidable foe to education and Christianity.¹⁴

J. Gresham Machen commented early in the 1920s on education concerning Christianity: "A Christian boy or girl can learn mathematics, for example, from a teacher who is not a Christian; and truth is truth however learned. But while truth is truth however learned, the bearing of truth, the meaning of truth, the purpose of truth, even in the sphere of mathematics, seem entirely different to

¹³ "In the late 19th c., long before all these symptoms appeared, R. L. Dabney, a prophetic theologian, predicted the complete secularization of public education in America. His prediction was based upon the principle and has come to pass with depressing accuracy. He said, 'Christians must prepare themselves then, for the following results: All prayers, catechisms, and Bibles will ultimately be driven out of these schools.' How could he have known this when he did? The answer is that he had a Biblical worldview, which he applied to the question of education in pluralistic America." R. L. Dabney, *On Secular Education* (Moscow, ID: Ransom Press, 1989), pg. 23. Quoted in Douglas Wilson, *Rediscovering the Lost Tools of Learning* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1991), pg. 42.

¹⁴ "It is conceded on all hands that John Dewey is our outstanding educational philosopher; his influence on American education has been immense. One reason for this is that his philosophy has not been very clearly understood. If it had been, the enthusiasm for his teaching would doubtless have been tempered more extensively by fear, or at any rate by misgivings." Charles W. Coulter and Richard S. Rimanoczy, *A Layman's Guide to Educational Theory*, pg. 148, quoted in Kenneth O. Gangel, "John Dewey: An Evangelical Evaluation," *Bibliotheca Sacra* (October, 1966), pg. 333.

the Christian from that which they seem to the non-Christian; and that is why a truly Christian education is possible only when Christian conviction underlies not a part, but all, of the curriculum of the school."¹⁵

¹⁵ J. Gresham Machen, *Education, Christianity, and the State* (Jefferson, MD: Trinity Foundation, 1987), pg. 81.

Dialogue

Mr. Christian: It's a pleasure Mr. Dewey that you have been willing to sit with me and have a discussion concerning education. One thing that we both have very much in common is our concern for the minds of young people and others in our country to be educated to the fullest extent, using the best possible methods. This however brings us to our discussion. We both see the need in the educational process and the education of our American brothers and sisters, however we both have different ideas on how this is to be accomplished. Would you not agree?

Mr. Dewey: Oh, yes you are quite correct in saying that our concern for education is there, but our philosophy is quite different.

Mr. Christian: Would you say we have a different starting point altogether. I mean, as a Christian, there are particular things I believe to exist, namely a Trinitarian , Absolute, Personal God who has revealed himself to us in nature and Scripture believe that this God has revealed not only a proper way of understanding Him, but also the world in which he has created. What are your ideas about God? How do you think about Christianity? Perhaps this would be a good starting point for our discussion together, then we can proceed (if you agree) to discussing the issue at hand, education.

Mr. Dewey: Well, as you say, we do both have differing starting points. I also want to try to stay away from our discussions on religious matters. I will answer your question on religion and God, but I would like to ask you to stay with the subject at hand, namely education. If religion and God are good for you and they have helped your life and your educational thoughts, I have no problem with that. For me, however, I want it to remain a private matter and not one to bring into our discussion.

Having said that however, I must remark that no man operates in a vacuum; for, as someone has said, "History is to the race what memory is to the individual." My thoughts about God and about

education have been shaped by the thinking of Jefferson, Mann, Barnard, Harris, Emerson, Pierce, James and Royce. Even the ideas of Locke, Rousseau, Pestalozzi, and Froebel have been of great influence to me, particularly as I studied at the Johns Hopkins University between 1880 and 1884 where I received my Ph.D. in Philosophy.¹⁶ I was Hegelian in my thinking earlier years, you probably recall one of my earliest published pieces in *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* which was edited by W. T. Harris a man to be considered the leader of the American Hegelian movement.¹⁷ So I believed philosophically in the dialectic method for awhile, but then it was William James' book entitled *Principles of Psychology* (1890)¹⁸ that really woke me from my Hegelian slumbers, and this set my attention on intelligence and freedom as a field of study for my life.¹⁹ I still prefer Hegel over all philosophers except perhaps Plato even today.²⁰ So there are obviously different starting points in philosophy which you and me will begin, particularly concerning Mr. Darwin.²¹

¹⁶ Kenneth O. Gangel, "John Dewey: An Evangelical Evaluation," *Bibliotheca Sacra* (October, 1966): pg. 326.

¹⁷ John Blewett, ed., *John Dewey: His Thought and Influence*, pg. 236., quoted in Gangel, "John Dewey," pg. 326. The title of the essay was called: "The Metaphysical Assumptions of Materialism." Dr. Harris wrote that the essay "showed a philosophical mind of high rank." Quoted in Jane Dewey, "Biography of John Dewey," *The Philosophy of John Dewey*, Paul A. Schilpp, ed. (Chicago, IL: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1939), pg. 14.

¹⁸ "James's seminal work, *Principles of Psychology*, was an extraordinarily effective critique of the determinism and pessimism that characterized Social Darwinism, with its view that evolution and change were a process over which human beings had not control. In this and his later work, he presented a way of looking at existence that came increasingly to be known as pragmatism. Founded in the writings of several philosophers, among them Chauncey Wright and Charles Saunders Pierce, pragmatism holds that an idea is to be tested not by some abstract inner logic but by its ability to give order and clarity within the flux of human experience. James, in a well-known phrase, spoke of the 'cash value' of ideas." Virginia Bernhard, David Burner, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, John McClymer, eds., *Firsthand America: A History of the United States*, 3rd Ed., Vol. II (St. James, NY:1993), pg.655.

¹⁹ Sidney Hook, ed., *John Dewey: Philosopher of Science and Freedom*, pg. 29., quoted in Gangel, "John Dewey," pg. 327. Jane Dewey wrote concerning William James's influence on Dewey: "James's influence on Dewey's theory of knowledge was exercised not by the *Pragmatism*, which appeared after Dewey's theory had been formed, but by chapters in the *Principles of Psychology* dealing with conception, discrimination and comparison, and reasoning. Dewey has frequently recommended these chapters to students as a better introduction to the essentials of a pragmatic theory of knowledge than the *Pragmatism*." Jane M. Dewey, "Biography of John Dewey," *The Philosophy of John Dewey*, ed. Paul A. Schilpp (Chicago: Northwester Univ. Press, 1939): pg. 23.

²⁰ Gangel, "John Dewey," pg. 327.

²¹ Dewey's wife recalls Dewey's undergraduate education at the Univ. of Vermont, in her biographical essay: "The senior year was given to introducing students into the larger intellectual world as a sort of "finishing" process, and featured philosophy. Professor H. A. P. Torrey gave lectures on psychology, a course based on Noah Porter's *Intellectual Philosophy*, and a shorter course in Butler's *Analogy*. Seniors read Plato's *Republic* and acquired some knowledge of British Empiricism from Bain's relatively innocuous *Rhetoric*...The philosophic teaching of Torrey was, like most philosophy taught in American colleges at this time, based upon the writings of the Scotch school. The idealistic-realistic controversy was not acute, and little was being written or said about Bishop Berkeley. The influence of the Scotch philosophers was due to their insistence upon intuitions, which formed, before the introduction of German spiritualistic idealism, the chief intellectual bulwark of moral and religious beliefs against the dissolving effect of English empiricism...The ideas that institutions of society carried in themselves a spiritual significance and that the Bible was inspired because it was inspiring were considered dangerous even in the diluted form in which Torrey presented them...These studies helped to fix the direction of Dewey's

I have been significantly influenced by the scientific approach and conclusions of Dr. Charles Darwin. It is no coincidence that I was born in the same year, 1859, that Darwin's masterpiece *The Origin of Species* was published. However, I do not think of myself so much as the philosopher as I do the educator. My philosophy is concerned primarily with the activity of experiencing. The scientific method is to be carried over from the laboratory into the school room and the philosophy library.²²

Let me speak to you specifically on my views of Christianity since you mentioned the starting point and as well with all respect, because you are a Christian. Much of my thoughts on Christianity changed during my studies at the Johns Hopkins University. As you know, I was accepted the religious teachings as a young person at the White Street Congregational Church in Burlington. I tried to believe in the doctrines of the church, but it was never with all my heart. In fact, with the idealism of Hegel whom I studied under Professor George S. Morris, there was fusion of emotions and my own intellect of trying to keep the religion of my youth and the philosophy I was learning as an adult. Hegel left a permanent deposit on my thinking. In fact, Hegel's idea of cultural institutions as an 'objective mind' upon which individuals were dependent in the formation of their mental life fell in with the influence of Comte and of Condorcet and Bacon. The metaphysical idea that an absolute mind is manifested in social institutions dropped out; the idea, upon an empirical basis, of the power exercised by cultural environment in shaping the ideas, beliefs, and intellectual attitudes of individuals remained. It was a factor in producing my belief that the not uncommon assumption in both psychology and philosophy of a ready-made mind over against a physical world as an object has no empirical support. It was a factor in producing my belief that only possible psychology, as distinct from a biological account of behavior, is a social psychology. The Hegelian emphasis upon continuity and the function of conflict persisted on empirical grounds after my earlier confidence in dialectic had given way to skepticism. I found that the development of my ideas led to problems of experience and the relation of knowledge to experience that occupied my time and intellectual energy

intellectual interests, if they did not settle his career at the time." Jane Dewey, "Biography of John Dewey," *The Philosophy of John Dewey*, Paul A. Schilpp, ed. (Chicago, IL: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1939): pp. 11-12.

for many years to come, particularly with my ideas concerning education.²³ As you know, In the teachings of Professor Hegel you have a thesis (an assertion “X”), an antithesis (another assertion in contrast to the first “Y”), that brings a person to a synthesis in their thinking (“XY=Z”). When I say that Dr. James “woke me from Hegelian slumbers” alluding to Kant’s remark about Dr. Hume, I mean that Dr. James teachings in utilitarianism helped me to understand God and religion in light of this. I was not forced to suspend judgement about religion as a skeptic following James, because I could understand religion in light of what helps man, as man. If religion and God help man and ultimately society, then what works that individual may be true for them, however, I do not have to accept it. In the Hegelian system, I was forced to synthesize my thesis and antithesis about God, but James helped me with the dilemma.

In speaking of religion in general, and Christianity in particular, I do not quite understand the idea or theory of justice which demands “vindication” of the law irrespective of instruction and reform of the wrong-doer, it seems that the God which Christianity posits is a bit unfair.²⁴ I also think that abolishing old institutions that were originally “Christian” in nature, would help our society greatly.²⁵ One of these is the home, the family, with its parental discipline, particularly their role in the educational process.²⁶ I think specifically that adults enforce habits on children because they distrust the child’s intelligence. The habits of the growing person are jealously kept within the limits of adult customs. We should avoid this, it takes from the delightful originality of the child when he is “tamed” like this.²⁷ Christianity within the home and with the dreaded catechism of children just reproduces the parents’ beliefs and thoughts into the child. What about individuality, freedom and the morals that develop within each child. We should avoid transcendental moral principles, those

²² Ibid., 327.

²³ Adapted from Jane M. Dewey, “Biography of John Dewey,” *The Philosophy of John Dewey*, ed. Paul A. Schilpp (Chicago: Northwester Univ. Press, 1939): pp. 17-19.

²⁴ John Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*, (), pg. 17.

²⁵ Ibid., pg. 73.

²⁶ Ibid., pg. 98.

²⁷ Ibid., pg. 98.

that are not empirical generalizations but eternal verities. Objectivity can be saved with these “eternal verities” but at the expense of connection with human affairs.²⁸

I believe about religion in general, Mr. Christian that it is no more than an interesting survival of an earlier period in mental evolution, a touching expression of the naïve longings and poetic imagination of primitive man.²⁹

Supernaturalism particularly is incompatible with the method and the spirit of scientific inquiry and with the relationships and institutions of democracy. It is philosophically untenable because of the belief in realities anteceding thought and practice, and its insistence on treating the ideal as more than the possibilities discoverable in experience and in some measure capable of realization through the intelligent and devoted efforts of human individuals. The supernatural, I must insist Mr. Christian, and its attempts to inculcate thoroughgoing assurance and a sense of absolute certainty and security are alike hostile to the intellectual enterprise and subversive of socially and morally constructive action. In short, supernaturalism is intellectually false and morally vicious.³⁰

I am not opposed to the existence of churches as a specific form of social institution. Let the churches recover their vitality by celebrating and reinforcing the fund of human values that are prized and that need to be cherished, values that are satisfied and rectified by all human concerns and arrangements. What I am against in Christianity is the way historically there has been a tendency to separate sheep and goats; the saved and the lost; the elect and the mass.³¹ Religious experience

²⁸ Ibid., pg. 52.

²⁹ Walter Horton, an associate of Dewey's at Columbia University wrote in 1925: "...it was generally understood that there was but on true philosophy, and Dewey was its prophet. Dewey himself was less orthodox than his followers, and less outspokenly antireligious; but he was at that time still in the most positivistic and naturalistic phase of his thinking." Quoted in Edward L. Schaub, "Interpretation of Religion," *The Philosophy of John Dewey*, ed. by Paul A. Schilpp (Chicago, IL.: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1939): pg. 397.

³⁰ John Dewey, *Experience and Nature* (1925), pg. 55; Quoted in Edward L. Schaub, "Interpretation of Religion," *The Philosophy of John Dewey*, ed., Paul A. Schilpp (Chicago, IL.: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1939): pp. 407-408.

³¹ John Dewey, *A Common Faith* (1934), pp. 82-84; Quoted in Edward L. Schaub, "Interpretation of Religion," *The Philosophy of John Dewey*, ed., Paul A. Schilpp (Chicago, IL.: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1939): 412-414.

should be involved in stressing moral conviction. We should acknowledge the rightful claim of what I call an “ideal end” that is over our desires and purposes.³²

Mr. Christian: Do you think then Mr. Dewey that there is any possibility of finding a ground to begin upon which we both agree and can dialogue about education? Do you think a dialogue about education with both of us having such contrasting views is possible? I appreciate your honesty Mr. Dewey about your basic presuppositions, but these are going to affect both of us in every way we interpret, particularly regarding education. Take for instance, your concern of the child being “tamed” by the parent in teaching the young one through discipline. There is obviously no lack of concern for morality in your teaching, but the question that I have is where do you get your morality?

Your views Mr. Dewey, with all respect, seem anti-Christian. You maintain that man is the final reference point, specifically the child in your last example, in the human experience. How can this be? How can you know anything about the world or about yourself, not to mention educating others to think. How can man look within, find his own ideals, and establish the criterion for knowledge and education within himself?³³ Is a fact not always a fact? Think about it. If I say a sentence about a specific thing, say an historical example for instance, does that fact not always remain the same fact no matter the condition?

For instance, I say: “The United States celebrates Independence Day on July 4th.” Does this fact ever change? J. Gresham Machen, the formidable foe of Modernism said once that a fact was a fact no matter how one interprets it. A fact remains objective, outside as it were, a person. It’s “factness” is not found in someone’s appreciation or acceptance of it, but by its very nature it is fact. How would you respond to this fact that I have asserted?

³² John Dewey, *A Common Faith* (1934), pp. 20-21; Quoted in Edward L. Schaub, “Interpretation of Religion,” *The Philosophy*

Mr. Dewey: You see you are misunderstanding me. I do not deny that the statement “the United States celebrates Independence Day on July 4th,” but I disagree with the importance of the statement in the realm of education. We must not just educate by passing along facts, for facts sake so that the person we educate becomes just as smart as the teacher and they can both go together to a cocktail party and share their knowledge with others. No, my approach to education is how do I get that fact to make sense in an individual’s life. For instance, I want to teach that the United States celebrates Independence Day on July 4th, but perhaps I am trying to teach a person who has no interest in this. Unless I first make them go about doing basic tasks this particular one may never come to the conclusion that they need this fact. How will the terms “United States,” “Independence Day,” or “July 4th” mean anything to the student unless its importance is discovered by the student? It would have no effect on the individual, or not “work” for the individual in a real-life situation unless the lack of the knowledge is encountered by the person.

Let me explain that as a young boy, my educational theory matured with my mind and body. In the time which I lived almost everyone I knew shared in household activities and responsibilities. My brother and I loved to read, but just did not understand what the teacher assigned as being very important to our real lives. By the time I had reached manhood and was a teacher myself, America was a very different place from what I had remembered as a boy. With the growth of cities and the industrialization of our society, particularly the use of machines in labor, it seemed rather strange for a teacher to effectively teach a young person the three “R’s” when they seemingly would have nothing to do with their later occupations. For instance, most of my own education until college was obtained outside the classroom and I wanted to attach in theory and practice, occupational activities as the most effective approaches to genuine learning and to personal intellectual discipline.³⁴

of *John Dewey*, ed., Paul A. Schilpp (Chicago, IL.: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1939): 414-415.

³³ Cornelius Van Til, *Essays on Christian Education* (Phillipsburg, NJ: 1979), pg. 50-51.

³⁴ Jane M. Dewey, “Biography of John Dewey,” *The Philosophy of John Dewey*, ed. Paul A. Schilpp (Chicago: Northwester Univ. Press, 1939): pg.9.

Mr. Christian: Can you not see with this type of education the best we will do is to educate a person according to vocation, or what they will find useful later in the world. Meaning, that it seems your end is to make money, or provide a job skill when this is not my idea of education. Education to me intellectually makes one capable, a job is an added extra so to speak. Taken your logic and teaching concerning education I can see the day when academies and universities will not exist to provide men with knowledge and intellect, to make a person intellectually capable and well-rounded, civilized individual, but the end will be to provide man with a job. It seems that although you say that you have built up from Dr. James, you still have his basic presupposition in mind when you think of education. Think about it, you are denying not only the real-ness and truth-ness of facts but that the fact will help men in and of themselves as intellectuals in this world. Rather, you are positing that the purpose of education primarily is to help capital and society in America. Given your ideas, the university and academy will only exist in the future if it “works” so to speak, if it helps man to obtain a skill, make money and therefore make society better. Would you say that I am understanding you correctly?

Mr. Christian: Can you not see that this will relativize all truth. Are we to just teach what a particular child or person wants to know? Are we simply to stay with the “facts” that they think they need, or are interested in. I can see your consistency from your basic underlying, philosophical principles of individuality and freedom, and why you would use this in education, but using your own principles does it truly “work”? Once again, this seems to find its foundation in Dr. James’ philosophy and it will only end in what may one day called a vocation or technical school rather than an academy.

Mr. Dewey: The only way a fact can mean anything is if it works for the person we are teaching it to. We must be sensitive to the individual’s needs and desires to know. I will never forget when I had my own children, Frederick, Evelyn, and Morris, and I watched their development and learning.

This gave me a practical emphasis to what I had learned from James of the importance of native tendencies and this caused me to attach a great importance to the proper development of young people. After this experience, I published two books for the training of teachers. My belief in the social function of philosophy, and my disregard for pure theorizing, I came to the conviction that existing educational methods, especially in the elementary schools, were not in harmony with the psychological principles of normal development. This inspired in me a desire for an experimental school which would combine psychological principles of learning with the principle of cooperative association which I derived from my moral studies. This should release children from the intellectual boredom that I experienced in my own school days as a young man. I wanted philosophy to find its social application and test in a direct educational experience in the school. I saw this fulfilled with my first Laboratory School, or the “Dewey School” as some called it, at the University of Chicago.³⁵

Mr. Christian: This would place the student over the teacher in importance, would it not? I think that objectively there is truth whether there was one person, or no one to consider it at all. What makes anything intelligible at all, or worthy of “fact-ness” is the fact that this is God’s world. What I am saying is that your belief systems or presuppositions seems to be in a tension. On the one hand you desire to teach people truths, but on the other hand you find that the truth is found only in the individual himself. How do you in this world truly know what facts are true if you seek to find not only some sort of truth in the individual, but you allow the determine what is true. It seems you begin and end with that which you would like to do, which is to educate.

Mr. Dewey: There you go with God. I told you, I think that religion is fine if it works for you. For many however, they do not find it necessary, therefore it should be separated from all education. I do hold that there needs to be some sort of universal to give meaning, but I determine that the

³⁵ Jane M. Dewey, “Biography of John Dewey,” *The Philosophy of John Dewey*, ed. Paul A. Schilpp (Chicago: Northwester Univ. Press, 1939): pp. 27-28.

individual himself is the universal. Truth is always changing by what is understood or interpreted by an individual. I remain in this world and try to empirically verify all things which I believe.

Mr. Christian: Tell me then Mr. Dewey, why do you want to educate at all? What is the purpose of it if there is not absolute meaning in this world? Furthermore, how are you going to educate anyone by just following a person's stream of consciousness and harnessing the facts that the individual needs? Do you not think that above and beyond the individual, there is by necessity a need for an absolute in education, specifically, even for us to be communicating or make sense out of a discussion with each other, I argue the absolute necessity of the God of Christianity.

Mr. Dewey: What about the God of other religions? Surely you will not leave them out in your religious observations. You seem to me Mr. Christian, as a thinking man, do not irritate me by succumbing to great shallowness and rigid intolerance. Whatever is taught must be taught because it is the need found in the student and the teacher, rather than just merely introducing facts has helped the person to find the criterion, or the need in the human experience within the student.³⁶ There are steps in the educational process which I have formulated because we think according to his five-step process. 1. Occurrence of a problem. 2. Analysis of the problem. 3. Formulation of hypothesis. 4. Experimentation and elaboration of ideas. 5. Corroboration of ideas.³⁷

Mr. Christian: Is this not similar to Francis Bacon's method of inductive reasoning? I know you are scientifically oriented but this is a strong rejection of dogmatism and memorization in the classroom, do you not think so?³⁸

³⁶ John Dewey, *Experience and Education* (), pg. 29.

³⁷ George R. Geiger, *John Dewey in Perspective* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1958). Quoted in Daniel Schugurensky, "Politics of Education," class syllabus for C191D-C207, UCLA Graduate School of Education and Information Studies, pg. 2.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pg. 2.

Mr. Dewey: That is exactly what I intend it to be. We must be scientifically oriented if we are to truly know anything.

Mr. Christian: In response to what you just said, may I ask you to consider this. We both have an end in mind when we think of education. You think of your end as being the greatest potential of the student found within himself, assisted by the educator, whereby he will be equipped for his unique walk in life. Your ultimate end is to make that person a better individual that will ultimately make for a better society—an educated society. I on the other hand think that real end is to truly understand the object data that is around us in this world. I believe we can truly teach the knowledge about this world because it is an ordered, created world by a God who has created it. He has revealed himself in the world of nature and in Scripture and I believe he is self-attesting.

What I mean by this is that we are carrying on a dialogue that means something to us both right now. In fact, we are not in a vacuum as we agreed upon, but both are coming from different philosophies and interpretations. However, it seems to me given your worldview and your method of educating, there would be no reason for discussion or understanding. If the world is not objective, then we must conclude it is constantly changing by something like chance. Therefore it is chaotic and there is not knowledge to truly be received. The only knowledge we therefore can have is that which we place upon it from our minds. It is our minds that order the world. If this be the case and this is a “working” solution since we do have to live here, then it would seem futile to even discuss these things. Ultimately we are both trying to convince the other one, or to teach the other what we understand to be true. This must be true outside of ourselves if we are to posit a “rightness”. This is more than mere “idealism” or “absolute-ness”. There is a personal aspect to this. I can explain why I am interested in education and the intelligibility of the world because I believe in a God who is absolute, personal and all knowing. He has created this world, therefore there objectively is no chaos even when I misinterpret what has been created as I many times do. Above and beyond how I

interpret the creation, it is there, and we can make sense out of it because it is ordered by God who has told us this in Scripture.

Mr. Dewey: You are speaking like a true Christian. This is exactly what I expected you to say about education, God and the universe.

Mr. Christian: Indeed I am speaking like a Christian, because I think as I stated before that it is the only way to have meaning or understanding or “factness” in anything at all. Furthermore, I would remind you that to state that “I am speaking like a true Christian” and to bring this to my attention with the implication that this is faulty is no argument on your part at all. You are merely denying my presuppositions that I tried to honestly state from the outset. I am also disagreeing with your presupposition, thus the reason for this dialogue. However, I am stating that without my position, the true understanding of Christianity, we could not speak of education, we could not be scientific in a chance universe, we would have no reason for even having this dialogue. Let me explain in an example what I am trying to say to you. For the sake of an argument, I want to interpret what you are saying in light of reality and I ask you to for a moment consider my position intellectually. Would you do that?

Mr. Dewey: Yes. Give me your example if you will and for the sake of an argument I will consider you position as Christian, as true.

Mr. Christian: Two men are reasoning in a room, postulating the existence of God. One man says to the other man, "I believe that a Sovereign, Creator God exists and I am his creature." The other man says, "I do not believe in such a God. In fact I am a-theist, or some call me an atheist." The first man says, "How can we discuss reasonably the true meaning of the universe and come to answers scientifically." The other man says "We should start upon what we do agree upon." The

first man says, "Alright, I believe I live in a world, as a creature, and that because an intelligent God created all that there is, I can be sure that there is real truth to be found. You on the other hand, are not a creature of this God. You must be inconsistent in order for our conversation to continue. You must presuppose the existence of God or you would have no real reason to search for meaning and truth about existence. Nothing is guaranteed for you; anything can happen. Even if you go on all the laws of natural science, which have been observed over 1,000,000 years, it may be subject to change any minute. I cannot see how we can talk, because you must tacitly assume God's existence in order to deny his existence."

The other man replies: "I can have a cogent conversation about your felt beliefs (opinions), and then you can listen to my felt beliefs (opinions). We may be able to come to a synthesis of views. However, I must ask you to be open-minded." The first man says: "How can I be open-minded with someone who from the beginning is non-creature, a seemingly thinking being, but one that can never come to real conclusions because in your denial of God, you've denied any possibility of reason or revelation. You must speak to me inconsistently in order to even consider my views because from the outset you have denied what I believe and all your reason must be inconsistent and unreliable, because you have no firm foundation in which to begin your postulating or your consideration of my claims. From whence does your foundation of anything come? Who are we sitting here in this unpredictable universe (well, for you it is a pluri-verse because you must affirm God's existence in order to have unity and diversity)."

The second man says: "I do not agree with you about what you said. I am a considerate and honest person willing to listen." The first man then asks: "What is considerate and honest? What is reason, and can we know we are really sitting here speaking? What language are you

speaking to me? From what foundation do you build your thoughts? I must sympathize with your position. When you deny the existence of God that you tacitly must assume to be there in order to care, or to even think you can find real truth and meaning in this world, especially if you consider me the one that needs to open my mind, and not yourself. You deny any mind to open."

The second man continues: "While I know that tacit knowledge, or a sense of divinity, is not merely a belief system, something must be said about our presuppositions in science. What are our expectations in discovery? Do we expect to get real knowledge? Will this knowledge tell us anything about our ourselves and the world in which we live? How can we claim "open-mindedness" and deny that which we set out to find? Where is order? In addition, what is our foundation for discovery? Everyday we gather information. We go to school for many years to study and learn new things. We learn things in science, art, mathematics, religion, and social studies but how do we relate all things individual things to one another? All these studies and knowledge exist, but is there any coherence, any unity to them all? Remember, if you will, the definition of what the university was originally. If not, it seems our discoveries will be quite boring and unprofitable."

From the discussion of the two men, you can see Mr. Dewey they may be a bit like ourselves. How did the first man, rather how can you account for the questions the second man asked? I can tell you my method of education and my end in education. It may "work" but that is not my ultimate goal in mind. My ultimate goal is to glorify God and to make him known to others. Therefore, I take a fact and I objectively try to understand it and I intelligibly pass on this information to students. It seems Mr. Dewey in your world of understanding, given your ideas about education, not only is there no reason to educate, but there would be no intelligibility at all. If experience and learning is up to the

individual, how do we explain the problem of those who do not want to learn? Much of educational history is intimately bound to discipline. The Scriptures say that man is by nature sinful, rebellious and does not want to know because he finds more of God, the more he looks. How do you respond to this.?

Mr. Dewey: I think it is quite possible, but both of us will have to concede in certain places and allow the other to try to convince. I do not believe in an absolute truth necessarily, but I do believe (as has happened to me in the past studying philosophy) that other views can be considered with hopes of influencing and changing one's opinions on a matter. Let me return quickly to discussion the idea of morals again with the God of Christianity in view. I think, rather than having to posit your transcendent, personal, God, that morals for instance, are not found in your God's laws but they are like language. Men did not ever intend language, but it grew unconsciously out of unintelligent babblings. Neither in grammar nor in morality is there any principle that should remain unchanged.³⁹

Besides the issues of morals being established in our world by Christianity, I am also against the Christian idea of absolute truth. Absolute truth is impossible and therefore morality is impossible. An individual mind needs not explanation apart from the fact that it is a complex of bodily habits.⁴⁰

Consider this Mr. Christian: man's rational and moral attributes have had a natural genesis just as literally as have the structures of his body. I reject the dualistic presupposition of classical philosophy and theology that experience centers in, or gathers about, or proceeds from a center or subject which is outside the course of natural existence, and set over against it.⁴¹ It seems to me that the necessary

³⁹ Ibid., pg. 79-80.

⁴⁰ Ibid., pg. 82.

⁴¹ John Dewey, *Creative Intelligence*, pg. 30; Quoted in John L. Childs, "Educational Philosophy of Dewey," *The Philosophy of John Dewey*, ed. Paul A. Schilpp (Chicago, Il.: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1939): pp. 422-423.

starting point of any aspect of human experience is the fact of the continuity of the human, the organic, and the physical.⁴²

Mr. Christian: This may sound like a sarcastic remark, but I would like you to consider it. Why do you make absolute statements with no room for subjectivity if there is no absolute truth. I mean, is what you are saying is that “Absolute truth is impossible” sometimes, all the time, whenever you feel like it? Even in answering that question you reveal your absolute understanding of norms. It seems that the Christian position makes sense out of metaphysical questions such as these. Mr. Dewey, you seem to care greatly about educational needs in the United States, there is no doubt in my mind about that, but why do you desire to educate? What is the purpose for an educated person in your mind? What is the person in being educated have anything to do with a society that is ungoverned, unordered, destined to extinction? I guess I am asking you where is purpose? What is truth? Why do we even consider speaking about these things, or try to educate? You have spent hours testing young people as to what is the best method of educating them. You have given most of your life to finding better ways of transferring information through education. I am just afraid, even baffled, that you depend on the one educated to tell you, the educator how to do it.

Mr. Dewey: Look Mr. Christian, I have heard all this before. Let me explain to you why I think your ideas are all dishonest when trying to truly know. First, particularly when it comes to education, you cannot verify that anything is true, or is a fact anymore than I can. You would have to show me your God, introduce him to me, give me the facts as they say. However, I am a scientific man, if I cannot observe it empirically, then why must I believe it. When we live in a progressive world who is tired of Christian dogmatics, we must appeal to the people through a better education. We need to be scientific in the educational process, not just bring some together in a room and teach them a lecture about “what, when, where, why, and how Columbus came to America. We need to observe

⁴² John L. Childs, “Educational Philosophy of Dewey,” *The Philosophy of John Dewey*, ed. Paul A. Schilpp (Chicago, IL:

these important students, find out what makes them tick. We should fill the room with things that they can handle, puzzles they can work, so that they would discover their need for particular facts. We should help them as educators, not catechize them. These times are much different than those before Mr. Darwin and his naturalism. Today, if there is anything such as metaphysics, we surely cannot go there. Kant has shown us that we live in a phenomenal world that communicates to us through our senses. There is a realm of metaphysical and we cannot go there, certainly cannot communicate there (and if anything is in the noumenal it obviously has not communicated to us), therefore we should stay with what we can know. The facts that make up this world. In fact, if we want to be influential at all and make education appealing, then we must first start by remaining scientific in a Scientific Age.⁴³

Mr. Christian: Mr. Dewey, you place so much stress on experience and you allow the student himself to be the one to whom we measure our method and our goals for education. Do you now see any problems in this? I mean, the student is the one to be educated, the educator should not be coming to experiment, but with real facts to teach to better the student so that they may know this world, ultimately the God who made it, thus without being an end in itself, they will help make a greater society.

Mr. Dewey: Mankind has hardly inquired what would happen if the possibility of experience were seriously explored and exploited. Religions have been saturated with the supernatural—and the supernatural signifies precisely that which lies beyond experience. Moral codes have been allied to this religious supernaturalism and have sought their foundation and sanction in it. Contrast with

Northwestern Univ. Press, 1939): pp. 422-423.

⁴³ “The objective of Dewey’s educational theory, which were closely knit into his general philosophy, comprise a high set of ambitions. In the first instance, Dewey was trying to devise a theory of education—of the development of intelligence and the role of knowledge—which would be wholly consistent with Darwinism. For a thinker born in the year which *The Origin of Species* (1859) was published, and intellectually raised during the flowering of evolutionary science, modern education would be worth nothing if it were not scientific.” Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (New York, NY: 1963), pp. 362-363.

such ideas, deeply imbedded in all Western culture, give the philosophy of faith in experience a definite and profound meaning.⁴⁴

Mr. Christian: With all respect Mr. Dewey, think of what you are saying. If we can only know from experience and empiricism then facts would mean nothing to anyone. If this is merely a chance universe, how do you “test” or “know” scientifically anything in a world of chaos?

Consider this, why do we not consider “how we know,” or our epistemology. When you assert facts and predication, you assert your understanding of the world which we both are perceiving. However, we are interpreting it both differently. Why are you interested in education at all given your interpretation of the world? If it to help your fellow man it is at best noble, but you are wanting to do more than this—right? Ultimately, you think you are correct and want to convince others (including myself) of your way of thinking. Given your belief about Naturalism and science man is merely a product of chance and evolution, how do you account of chance and regularity at the same time? I mean if man are here by chance (evolved), mere programmed “masses of flesh” (pardon the graphic term), then why study or educate others at all?

Mr. Dewey: Human traits, capacities, and interests, are not less real or efficacious, because they have developed by a natural evolutionary process. Man is no less rational because his capacities for reflection have developed from organic activities which are not consciously purposeful. Whatever creative abilities man has exhibited in his art, in his science, in his technology, and in his social relationships, these are the traits which define the distinctively human, and they are not to be eliminated by any theory about man’s origin and psychological make-up.⁴⁵ For me, Mr. Christian evolution denotes emergence. Emergent events are not to be explained away by metaphysical

⁴⁴ John Dewey, “A Credo,” *Living Philosophies*, pp. 22-23; Quoted in John L. Childs, “Educational Philosophy of Dewey,” *The Philosophy of John Dewey*, ed. Paul A. Schilpp (Chicago, IL.: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1939): pp. 421-422.

⁴⁵ John L. Childs, “Educational Philosophy of Dewey,” *The Philosophy of John Dewey*, ed. Paul A. Schilpp (Chicago, IL.: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1939): pp. 423-424.

dogma; they are to be taken for whatever they are found to be. The term “naturalistic” has many meanings. It means on the one side, that there is no breach of continuity between operations of inquiry and biological operations and physical operations. “Continuity,” on the others side, means that rational operations grow out of organic activities, without being identical with that from which they emerge.⁴⁶

Mr. Christian: Where does objectivity and your understanding of fact stand in a world the creates sentient beings that are products of an accident? If you give “chance” a chance as an essence to be your objectivity for just one moment, it seems to argue positively for objectivity while at the same time denying your facts. If chance is an essence and the reason for man, then you cannot have regularity, or you cannot understand data as objective, or changing etc. How do you not know that things will be different in the next moment when you forsake regularity which is implied in a chance universe?

Perhaps for the sake of an argument that you are right about evolution by change, natural selection, etc. Does this truly make sense in the world in which we find ourselves? I have already asserted a problem with any chance and regularity as a relationship. Chance is no-thing; it is nothing. It has no ontological being. How can you have any testability or reliability to support your data received strictly empirically? Consider my position as a Christian. I posit a God who is Three Persons (diversity / relational), One in essence (unity / objectivity). This God has revealed himself in creation therefore there is real knowledge to be obtained, I would agree with you. I also would grant that there is a sense in which we do look at the individual in education to determine the best way to educate them. However, I can assert facts and make claims about reality, even the individuality of a person in a diverse world because of the Great Trinitarian Creator who has made all these things.

⁴⁶ Ibid., pg. 424.

You see, Mr. Dewey, your motives are good if they are to better educate people. However, I interpret this entire dialogue differently because I believe God in his common grace has not merely manifested himself in creation (or in creatures), but what He has done uniquely in man is imprint upon him his image. This makes men worthy of education, even able to be educated. If God had not plainly revealed himself in all things we would have no questions, or reasons to object or receive any data whatsoever, nor the questions or method we raise concerning education. This comes down to authority. You posit that the authority in education is in the educatee, the student. I say the authority for education and all other things in this world is because of God's Authority. Would you mind telling me from whence your authority comes to give you proof of facts such as evolution in our world?

Please see that whether you are taking facts to the student or merely discussing the metaphysics and epistemology that supports your educational theory, you are taking subjective information ("proof" of evolution), and interpreting it subjectively to come to your conclusions that construct your worldview. How do you or I know what is true or how do we rightly interpret our origins as men if we were not present in the beginning of all things (or even in your theory that there may not have ever been a beginning, although I do not think you want to go that far)? We must conclude that we both are relying upon authority no matter how much information we have. I decide this concerning education...you decide that, etc. What gives either of us any right in our observation of the world to predicate? How can we truly say "what is" and "what is not"?

I take my authority from Scripture through which God has revealed himself. He tells me about himself and myself and additionally, knowledge of the world and my place within it. This gives me confidence to determine and draw conclusions. How do I know God is true, that he exists? How do I know what Christianity says is true? I answer by saying that without this "proof" of Christianity (the self-attesting nature of Christianity), there could be no predication, no possibility of proof at all.

It is the only worldview to make sense out of the world and of other worldviews, either when it comes to metaphysics, epistemology, or how to educate people.

I must now ask you: From whence does your authority come? May I suggest that if you truly considered Christianity “for the sake of an argument” then you would realize it makes sense of reality in this world. If you receive data from evidences, theory, or science, do you not have to draw conclusions of your own (sometimes distinct from others like myself), and would you not agree that you must interpret the data by your own authority? Using your Pragmatic Instrumentalism, this does not work. It is not solid enough to provide you answers. When you judge the Bible as true, Christianity as true or false, conclusions in science, or how to educate, you must “stand above” them, as it were, and pass judgements (interpretations). This is the problem of your ultimate autonomy. If you agree to what I am saying, then you must also understand what causes violence, war and the degeneration, and de-evolution of our race but men’s ideas. Ideas that men have (when considering your worldview), evolved to this place, place or demand that their autonomous conclusion is correct. This ultimate breeds war, something that in your progressive mind you yourself said education could eventually prevent. Autonomous man must submit to the Authority, which is God if you are to ever have not only real knowledge, but real peace.

Thank you for your time Mr. Dewey, the hope of the gospel is the God who has made man in his image, who has equipped them with gifts of reason, has made a Garden and come to dwell with his image-bearers. Man in cosmic rebellion, disobeyed and fell from their great position. In his fallenness man suppresses the knowledge of God, exchanges him for a lie and worships the creature rather than the Creator who is forever praised! Man does not seek God or even understand himself rightly because of his lack of knowledge of God. In his grace, God has restored the relationship between man and himself in the Savior—the Person of Christ. He has become our substitutionary propitiation to appease God’s righteous wrath because of our disobedience. Jesus Christ is the

second Adam, restored humanity that knows God and himself rightly. Incidentally, he has begun to restore the creation as well and given his people “a taste” of the world and life that is to come. What joy! What life! What true education and knowledge! What a Creator! He is the One from whom all blessings flow and the one we seek for true, absolute, objective, knowledge (John 17:3). Without this right knowledge there are no facts, there are no true or real education.

I. What Education Is

Mr. Dewey: The main influence into my ideas of education have been from Mr. William James as a philosopher. As I noted earlier, James awoke me from my Hegelian slumbers and into the reality of thinking about not just “fixed” ideas *per se*, but what were the consequences or the end results of ideas, which led me to my thoughts on the process of education. You see, Mr. James taught what has been termed “Pragmatism” and it is basically the idea that we use our stream of consciousness and we take hold and harness the stream of thoughts and sensations that flows through us. Applied, to children or those being educated, this is a gushing river that is an unending source of uniqueness and creativity. James taught be to take ideas and rather than looking for a kind of inner coherence of truth within the ideas, but to what were the consequences of the idea, or its “cash value.”

Pragmatism helps educate because it is not concerned with taking date and then making it known to those being educated, but it is by means of continual experimentation to find out what works best. Children learn, by constant encounter with their environment, constant adjustment to its facts and demands. If children pursue activities such as agriculture, crafts and industry, under the supervision of teachers, they will discover their need for specific subjects that are normally taught in the schools.⁴⁷

Mr. Dewey: My definition of education is very broadly defined. It includes schooling, but it is by no means restricted to it. Education in its most inclusive meaning denotes any change wrought in an

⁴⁷ Bernhard, Burner, Fox-Genovese, McClymer, *Firsthand America*, pp. 655-656.

individual as a result of experience. In a narrower definition, education is a conscious effort by some organized group to shape the conduct and the emotional and intellectual dispositions of its young.⁴⁸

All deliberate education, in contrast to the education in life experience, is a moral undertaking. I believe we engage in deliberate education because we desire to make of the young something they would not become if left to their own unguided interactions with their natural and social environments.

Mr. Christian: It is interesting that you do make a distinction between what we learn from experience in life and what we learn by what you call deliberate education. It is true, as I stated earlier, that we do have an end in mind when we try to educate. Also, as we have noted, we disagreed on the means to that end and I know we will discuss our methods at a later time in our dialog. However, how do you expect to produce a moral child from education? How can you define moral? Secondly, why is it that children, given your philosophy of human nature cannot learn by “unguided interaction with their natural and social environments?” I would answer that man is by nature sinful, not only is this a reasonable doctrine that explains the reasons why all humans long for peace, but never find anything but war. Greater than this, the Scripture that is revealed to us, tells us that we have been separated from God by our sins. The Scripture speaks of all our inclinations being sinful from our heart. This would explain the reason why we need to educate and why discipline must accompany education if it is to be instilled into a child. By nature, the Scriptures say that we do not want to learn, we do not want to obey our authorities. The only reason why man, apart from God searches the universe and studies science is because of him being made in the image of God. How can your worldview account for not only your theory of education, but why man is as he is, sinful from birth?

⁴⁸ John L. Childs, “Educational Philosophy of Dewey,” *The Philosophy of John Dewey*, ed. Paul A. Schilpp (Chicago, IL:

Mr. Dewey: I believe that morals are what humans have learned from experience as they have progressed to seek a meaning among men. We do not have absolutes in all countries of the world, but in a particular nation such as America, or region, we educate based on the attempt to build a community that will work. Therefore we try to bond together based on principles that are within us and we educate the young so that the experience that we have learned and passed down for many years in the “social contract” might be instilled in the young person. This is what I call morals and this is the “absolute” without altogether assuming a God in particular, or theism in particular.

Mr. Christian: May I interrupt you for a moment

Mr. Dewey: Go right ahead.

Mr. Christian: You said that there was a moral that all men have gathered around and submitted themselves to. You have denied the fact that there is a moral absolute based on a Personal, Trinitarian, self-sufficient God, but men do not have the same “morals” as you say. In fact, it is best learned from experience that men do naturally enjoy a time of peace among brothers, but this is ultimately inconsistent with your other philosophy of evolution and Darwinism. First of all, the child would not have to be guided as you say in education, because naturally he would learn to adapt and survive in the world that Darwin has made. He would not need any interference, but would ultimately either survive or become extinct among men. Second, part of Darwin’s theory as you will recall is that only the strongest will survive. Men do not look to try and find a common-denominating ideas, what you call morals, rather they submit to the morals of the strongest and if they do not, they perish. This is your philosophy brought to its ultimate conclusion. The philosophy you propose to follow and the education, you that you propose will get us there as a society, is destined to fail ultimately.

Mr. Dewey: It is the very nature of life to strive to continue in being because life is a self-renewing process. What nutrition and reproduction are to physiological life, education is to social life. This education consists primarily in transmission through communication. Communication is a process of sharing experience till it becomes a common possession. While every social arrangement is educative in effect, the educative effect first becomes an important part of the purpose of the association in connection with the association of the older with the younger. As societies become more complex in structure and resources, the need of formal or intentional teaching and learning increases.⁴⁹

Mr. Dewey: The development within the young of the attitudes and dispositions necessary to the continuous and progressive life of a society cannot take place by direct conveyance of beliefs, emotions, and knowledge. It takes place through the intermediary of the environment. The social environment consists of all the activities of fellow beings that are bound up in the carrying on of the activities of any one of its members. It is truly educative in its effect in the degree in which an individual shares or participates in some conjoint activity. By doing his share in the associated activity, the individual appropriates the purpose which actuates it, becomes familiar with its methods and subject matters, acquires needed skill, and is saturated with its emotional spirit.⁵⁰

II. What the School Is

III. The Subject-Matter of Education

⁴⁹ John Dewey, *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education* (New York, NY:1920), pg. 13.

⁵⁰ John Dewey, *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education* (New York, NY:1920), pg. 27.

Mr. Dewey: The subject matter of education consists primarily of the meanings which supply content to existing social life. The continuity of social life means that many of these meanings are contributed to present activity by past collective experience. As social life grows more complex, these factors increase in number and import. Especially is the educator exposed to the temptation to conceive his task in terms of the pupil's ability to appropriate and reproduce the subject matter in set statements, irrespective of its organization into his activities as a developing social member.⁵¹

IV. The Nature of Method

Mr. Dewey: For our method, we should use the method of experience to make a naturalistic theory of existence the common presupposition of one's philosophical outlook and educational practice. The naturalistic outlook is as fundamental as the empirical method. The connection is so intimate that the full import of my philosophy of education can be discerned only as you grasp that it is grounded in a naturalistic interpretation of human beings and their experiences.⁵²

Mr. Dewey: Method is a statement of the way the subject matter of an experience develops most effectively and fruitfully. It is derived, accordingly, from observation of the course of experiences where there is not conscious distinction of personal attitude and manner from material dealt with. The assumption that method is something separate is connected with the notion of the isolation of mind and self from the world of things. It makes instruction and learning formal, mechanical, constrained.⁵³

V. The School and Social Progress

⁵¹ John Dewey, *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education* (New York, NY:1920), pg. 226-227.

⁵² John L. Childs, "Educational Philosophy of Dewey," *The Philosophy of John Dewey*, ed. Paul A. Schilpp (Chicago, IL.: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1939): pp. 421-422.

⁵³ John Dewey, *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education* (New York, NY:1920), pg. 211.

Conclusion

It has been said many times, that ideas have consequences. Indeed, John Dewey has made his impact on American society. With his particular brand of “Pragmatic Individualism,” another brand of secular humanism that has been imposed on education and our educational system in our country. As Richard J. Neuhaus has written about Dewey that he got an awful lot of things wrong, but Dewey did understand, as few intellectuals today do understand, that the American democratic experiment is indeed an experiment. Dewey knew that it is an experiment that cannot be sustained without a public philosophy, and that such a public philosophy must be grounded in moral truth.⁵⁴ Dewey provided a public philosophy that America needed at just the right time.

He rejected God and posited a moralism without any support of absolutes. He took what was good in James’s Pragmatism and harnessed it to produce an educated person based not on facts or ends that would reveal a God of Scripture, but would suit the whims and needs of a person who the Scriptures describe as selfish, suppressing the truth of God, and one who is ever learning but never coming to a knowledge of the truth. His impact is clearly seen from the government of the United States, down to each individual in our country today that subscribes to an “outcome based education.” It is not so important “what” the young person learns, it is what the person “wants” to learn which is the goal in education today.

Coupled with the fact that the United States government is bigger than it has ever been and is controlling many aspects of society. It is also controlling most educational institutions, if not explicitly, then it has influenced education implicitly in some way. J. Gresham Machen wrote in 1922: “The object of education, it is now assumed, is the production of the greatest happiness for the greatest number. But the greatest happiness for the greatest number, it is assumed further, can be defined only by the will of the majority. Idiosyncrasies in education, therefore, it is said, must be avoided, and the choice of schools must be taken away from the individual parent and placed in the hands of the state. The state then exercises its authority through these instruments that are ready to

⁵⁴ Richard J. Neuhaus, “The Real John Dewey,” *First Things* (January 1992): 54-55.

hand, and at once, therefore, the child is placed under the control of psychological experts, themselves without the slightest acquaintance with the higher realms of life, who proceed to prevent any such acquaintance being gained by those who come under their care... For a time it looked as though the utilitarianism which came into vogue in the middle of the nineteenth century would be a purely academic matter, without the influence upon daily life. But such appearances have proved to be deceptive. The dominant tendency, even in a country like America, which formerly prided itself on its freedom from bureaucratic regulations of the details of life, is toward a drab utilitarianism in which all higher aspirations are to be lost.”⁵⁵

Richard J. Neuhaus observes that Dewey understood that the self-evident truths on which this democratic experiment is based is not self-evident to most people; they have to be rediscovered and rearticulated in every generation. He said that Dewey’s great mistake was to think that he could break those truths away from their necessary and continuing dependence upon biblical religion.⁵⁶

Warren Nord comments on Dewey’s influence in secular religion: “Dewey was the major intellectual force behind the first ‘Humanist Manifesto,’ and we can see a little more clearly now how that document could be both secular and religious. The worldview behind the *Manifesto* is largely that of modern science and liberal individualism; it explicitly rejects supernaturalism... [The *Manifesto* says] ‘Religion, consists of those actions, purposes, and experiences which are humanly significant.’ Indeed it continues, ‘The distinction between the sacred and the secular can no longer be maintained’.”⁵⁷

George Marsden writes: “The troublesome problem for a secular liberal society, however, was how to establish the grounds on which the citizenry should accept progressive moral ideals. The answer, especially for those influenced by the social sciences, was to invest science with supreme cultural authority. Thus reform-minded social scientists could speak, as Benedict did, as though science itself

⁵⁵ J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: 1992 Reprint), pp. 11-12.

⁵⁶ Richard J. Neuhaus, “The Real John Dewey,” *First Things* (January 1992): 54-55.

⁵⁷ Warren A. Nord, *Religion and American Education: Rethinking A National Dilemma* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995), pg. 177

legitimated a worldview that all educated modern people would accept. Fundamentalists and others would disappear once education based on scientific principles was sufficiently widespread. John Dewey was the high priest of this faith. As he argued in his Terry Lectures at Yale, published in 1934 as *A Common Faith*, universal education could foster a rational humanistic religion dedicated to the healthy adjustment of humans to their social environments so as to promote “goods—the values of art in all its forms, of knowledge, of effort and of rest after striving, of education, and fellowship, of friendship and love, of growth in mind and body.”⁵⁸

The education of the United States today is glaringly different that in other times of our country’s history. In the time of the Puritans, when our country was young and there was a need to educate people in the new world as a new commonwealth was established, the Law of Massachusetts of 1642 ruled that each town was “to take account from time to time of all parent and masters, and of their children, concerning their calling and employment of their children, especially of their ability to read and understand the principles of religion and the capitall lawes of this country.”⁵⁹ According to Paul Scotchmer, the overlapping concerns of Puritan education was piety (principles of religion), morality (capitall lawes), and utility (calling and employment).⁶⁰

The importance of the Puritan education was the means with a view to the ends. The puritan education was to be involved *solī deo gloria* to point the child to the station, vocation, or calling in life which God was to bring them. It was through education that the Puritan child came to understand his place in God’s world and in the building up of his community; this was all interrelated. This was accomplished, writes Paul F. Scotchmer, not in a mechanical or casuistic way, but through an understanding of first principles. Relations between parent and child, husband and wife, citizen and magistrate, church member and pastor, worker and employer, buyer and seller, poor and wealthy, church and state, heaven and earth—each was to be understood in the context of

⁵⁸ George M. Marsden, *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief* (New York, NY: Oxford Press, 1994), pg. 375.

⁵⁹ Paul F. Scotchmer, “The Aims of American Education,” *Christian Scholar’s Review* (Autumn 1989): 100-101.

⁶⁰ David Tyack, ed., *Turning Points in American Educational History* (Lexington, Mass.: Xerox Publishing Co., 1967), pp. 14f.; quoted in Paul F. Scotchmer, “The Aims of American Education,” *Christian Scholar’s Review* (Autumn 1989): 100.

God's ultimate sovereignty, and the mediation of God's sovereignty through Christ (internally) and divinely appointed authorities (externally).⁶¹

In the next two centuries, men would turn from seeing God as necessary in light of the Enlightenment and scientific discoveries, to understanding a God that is only as good as he will help men to achieve happiness and keep society ordered. Scotchmer writes: "We must be careful to distinguish between the Puritan and the Yankee. The first was a pious man who worked hard at his calling, in order to glorify God and add what he could to comfort and convenience of the community. The second was a good man who tried to improve himself in ways that would simultaneously benefit the community."⁶² Thomas Jefferson would declare concerning religion that "True religion is morality...the only religion that has any value, and not actually harmful, is the religion whose doctrines all religions have in common; namely the moral precepts, innate in man, and made part of his physical constitution, as necessary for his social being..."⁶³ According to Jefferson, dogmatic religion had no place in the schools, but "true religion" which lies within the grasp of reasoning of a free and moral agent was to be accepted.⁶⁴

Following the Enlightenment period, but building on its foundation or arguably its destruction of society, Horace Mann (1796-1859) established public schools for the education of the entire society in America. This great experiment that is with us to this day was to be, according to him, in direct competition to Parochial and Sectarian schools. Mann's vision of education was to be the great equalizer of the conditions of men—the balance-wheel of the social machinery as he put it. Education was to be the means by which society could enlarge the cultivated class and obliterate factious distinctions.⁶⁵

By the time of William Torey Harris (1835-1908) a follower of Hegel, religious education and secular education had become two different animals. Harris said, "the principle of religious instruction is authority; that of secular instruction is demonstration and verification. It is obvious that these two principles should not be brought into the same school, but separated as widely as possible."⁶⁶ In contrast to Harris' ideology, Dewey conceived of a child-centered education. From the piety of the Puritans' education centered in God's character

⁶¹ Paul F. Scotchmer, "The Aims of American Education," *Christian Scholar's Review* (Autumn 1989): 106.

⁶² Ibid., "The Aims of Education," (Autumn 1989): 107.

⁶³ Letter to John Adams, May 5, 1817; see Andrew A. Lipscomb and Albert E. Bergh, eds., *Writings of Thomas Jefferson* (Washington, D.C., 1903), 15:427; quoted in Scotchmer, "The Aims of Education," (Autumn 1989): 108.

⁶⁴ Letter to John Adams, May 5, 1817, in Lipscomb and Bergh, 15:427; quoted in Scotchmer, "The Aims of Education," (Autumn 1989): 108.

⁶⁵ *The Republic and the School: Horace Mann on the Education of Free Men*, ed. Lawrence Cremin (New York: Teachers College Press, Columbia University, 1957), pp. 105, 107; quoted in Scotchmer, "The Aims of Education," (Autumn 1989): 109.

and revelation, to the Enlightenment claims of a necessary God only in the sense that he can order society and make man better, to John Dewey in the twentieth century who had completely separated into another realm, the idea of education and the idea of religion. Dewey said in his work *A Common Faith*, that his own pragmatism was the highest form of religion. Regarding his faith in the continued disclosing of truth through directed cooperative human endeavor, he wrote that it is more religious in quality than is any faith in a completed revelation. He claimed that religion was any activity pursued in behalf of an ideal end against obstacles and in spite of threats of personal loss because of conviction of its general and enduring value is religious in quality.⁶⁷

In the end, as Paul Scotchmer writes: “[Education] basically...amounts to the inculcation of practical knowledge and skills for the purposes of social order and material well-being. Certainly God is out of the picture, along with the piety mandated by belief in a personal God. And by default, if not by design, serious moral investigation is also out of the picture. What remains is utility, whether for the individual alone or society as a whole.”⁶⁸

⁶⁶ “The Separation of the Church from the Tax-Supported School,” *Educational Review* 26 (Oct. 1903): 228, 232, 234; quoted in Scotchmer, “The Aims of Education,” (Autumn 1989): 112.

⁶⁷ *A Common Faith* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1935), pp. 26, 27; quoted in Scotchmer, “The Aims of Education,” (Autumn 1989): 115.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, Scotchmer, “The Aims of Education,” (Autumn 1989): 117.

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⁶⁹ Taken from: *The Bibliography of John Dewey*, ed. M. H. Thomas and H. W. Schneider (New York, NY: 1929). Listed in "Writings of John Dewey to October, 1939," *The Philosophy of John Dewey*, Paul A. Schilpp, ed. (Chicago, IL: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1939): pp. 611-676.

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