THE ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOK OF RELIGIOUS NATURALISM

Edited by Donald A. Crosby and Jerome A. Stone

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2018
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Names: Crosby, Donald A., editor.
Title: The Routledge handbook of religious naturalism / edited by Donald A. Crosby and Jerome A. Stone.
Description: 1 [edition]. | New York : Routledge, 2018. |
Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2017040565| ISBN 9781138292079 (hardback) | ISBN 9781315228907 (ebook)
Subjects: LCSH: Naturalism—Religious aspects.
Classification: LCC BL183 .R68 2018 | DDC 201/.77—dc23
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2017040565

ISBN: 978-1-138-29207-9 (hbk)
ISBN: 978-1-315-22890-7 (ebk)

Typeset in Bembo
by Apex CoVantage, LLC

5

A UNITY WITH THE UNIVERSE

Herder, Schelling, and Dewey on natural piety

John R. Shook

This chapter situates John Dewey's type of religious naturalism within the course of nineteenth-century philosophy of religion. His intellectual genealogy from Herder and Schelling through Goethe, Coleridge, and Trendelenburg infused his university years by way of the idealisms of James Marsh and George Morris. The ample continuities between his early ethical idealism and his late naturalistic humanism were central to his entire philosophy. Dewey's shocking 1934 announcement in *A Common Faith* that naturalism can accommodate a God was no surprise to himself.

Dewey's God and his view of the religious life remains one of the few viable options for religious naturalism in the twenty-first century. Pursuing the question, "Why did Dewey in his mid-seventies return to the religious philosophy he absorbed in his twenties?" discovers no retreat from naturalism, but the fulfilment of naturalism.

Nature and God

Religious naturalism, generally speaking, offers some sort of naturalism compatible with religiosity. Dewey's variety of naturalism (Shook 2011) can accommodate natural territories suitably hospitable for, and worthy of, religious attitudes and activities. Religiosity has a robustly ontological object, if it would accept both scientific and philosophical guidance. God's reality can pass Dewey's strictest empirical standard for proof, a pragmatist's proof:

> In reality, the only thing that can be said to be "proved" is the existence of some complex of conditions that have operated to effect an adjustment in life, an orientation, that brings with it a sense of security and peace. The particular interpretation given to this complex of conditions is not inherent in the experience itself.
>
> (*LW* 9: 10)[1]

Dewey's God is a special complex of natural conditions effecting adjustments and satisfactions in ethical living, so it is a candidate for this pragmatist sort of proof. This God is not reducible to anything merely subjective or projective. God does not subsist only within human experience, past or future; nor does God reduce to what humans ideally aspire to, presently or potentially. As this chapter explains, the reality of Dewey's God does not depend

on our aspiration to pursue religious lives; our lives become religious when we aspire to pursuing intelligent lives.

Two competing conceptions of "God" as either a particular being or a set of ideals have dominated the imaginations of Western minds, as Dewey reminds us in *A Common Faith* (*LW* 9: 29). He then promptly rejects both conceptions—his God is neither just substantial, nor merely ideal. Instead, their integration earns Dewey's approval, because natural forces are necessary for the meaning and realization of ideals in life's activity. "It is this *active* relation between ideal and actual to which I would give the name 'God'" (*LW* 9: 34). Something natural that is undergoing active relations cannot merely be something humanly ideal, nor something transcendentally real. Very few philosophers have rightly understood Dewey's God, typically misled by mistaking his initial opposition of a theistic God to an idealistic God for the supposition of a forced dichotomy.[2]

For Dewey, our intelligent lives are within God and guided by God, and God is correspondingly changed by our living pursuits and achievements. Indeed, not only should this God be recognized for its naturally ontological status, Dewey's God also participates in many features we take to be characteristic of life itself. This God is organized and dynamic, and it displays coherence, self-maintenance, and growth. In a naturalistic sense, as we shall see, Dewey's God is a living God.

Dewey's naturalism is grounded in a distinctive philosophy of nature that had notable predecessors. Herder and Schelling advanced a *Naturphilosophie*—a Nature Philosophy—proposing that a World-God envelops, sustains, and advances Mind's knowledge of the world. *Naturphilosophie* dominated the early nineteenth-century aftermath of the Lessing-Jacobi "Pantheism Controversy" over Spinoza's controversial legacy (Yasukata 2002). G. E. Lessing had reportedly admitted his pantheism to F. H. Jacobi with the phrase, "*Hen kai Pan!* I know of nothing else." Herder did likewise with his own formulation, "We are on even ground on God's creation," also confided to Jacobi (Beiser 2009: 102, 160).

Dewey, like Herder and Schelling, developed a Nature Philosophy akin to pantheism, but even more indebted to the scientific worldview. None of them were Idealists in the usual sense of the term, for they denied that reality is fundamentally conscious and only exists for mind, and they refused to conceive God as a personal being. Herder, Schelling, and Dewey regarded their philosophies of nature as realistic and scientific. All three philosophers also denied that mechanistic atomism must be the final word from science, anticipating the integration of biology with chemistry without reducing one science's categories to the other's. Life and matter are only qualitatively distinct, distinguishable by their proper activities and contexts. Life is demarcatable where there is a logical and ontological priority of wholes over parts (organicism) and a dominance of ends over means (teleology).

Dewey's inclusive philosophy, both early and late, should be situated within a general worldview indebted to Herder, Schelling, and Hegel, and developed by later thinkers such as Coleridge and Trendelenburg.

The Sentient and the Sacred

The worldview Dewey inherited and developed amounts to a Nature Philosophy emphasizing these seven themes:

(a) Life is no accidental and irrelevant sheen upon nature, because life's essential powers are as abidingly and importantly natural as anything.
(b) This organicist view of nature guarantees that life and sentience cannot be separate from nature, but are expression of, and perpetuation of, nature's vital powers.

(c) The mentality of sentience especially expresses the purposive engagement of life with its environs, so it cannot be explanatorily reduced to static, formal, or mechanistic matters.
(d) As intelligence advances, it becomes ever more social and scientific, and communal intelligence creatively expands the complexities to life's engagements with environing natural conditions.
(e) Because creative intelligence is at home within nature, encultured piety towards nature's ways is not reliant on rationalistic categories framing experience (contra Kant) but directly expressive of intelligent conduct dealing with nature's resources.
(f) Conduct's enlarging engagement with nature correlates closely with due reverence and natural pieties, so valuing nature neither requires mystical absorption into nature nor "intrinsic" values for nature.
(g) The object of natural piety ("God") is not transcendent or aloof from humanity, but intrinsically interfused with humanity's own sentient energies in growing harmonious relationships.

For this Nature Philosophy, the Sentient and the Sacred are not divided by ontology or axiology. To be naturalistically religious is just intelligence's own realization of what it can accomplish and what it is ultimately for. Intelligence and piety have a common natural basis and a shared object of attention.

In *A Common Faith*, published in 1934, Dewey provided an encapsulation of natural piety and its proper natural object:

> Our successes are dependent upon the cooperation of nature. The sense of the dignity of human nature is as religious as is the sense of awe and reverence when it rests upon a sense of human nature as a cooperating part of a larger whole. Natural piety is not of necessity either a fatalistic acquiescence in natural happenings or a romantic idealization of the world. It may rest upon a just sense of nature as the whole of which we are parts, while it also recognizes that we are parts that are marked by intelligence and purpose, having the capacity to strive by their aid to bring conditions into greater consonance with what is humanly desirable. Such piety is an inherent of a just perspective in life. Understanding and knowledge also enter into a perspective that is religious in quality. Faith in the continued disclosing of truth through directed cooperative human endeavor is more religious in quality than is any faith in a completed revelation.
>
> (*LW* 9: 25–26)

Dewey then labels as "God" that cooperation of human goals and wider nature—that "union of ideal ends with actual conditions" (*LW* 9: 35).

Nothing about this God is hidden or hypothetical. Although God cannot be an object for scientific fields or the objective of science's theorizing, this God must the ground for every successful intellectual inquiry. God is revealed through any intelligence's work with the world, and that work transforming the world makes God real. This understanding of God was explored by Dewey over 40 years earlier (Shook and Good 2010). His 1893 essay "Christianity and Democracy" set out that understanding of God:

> God is essentially and only the self-revealing, and the revelation is complete only as men come to realize Him. ... The revelation is, and can be, only in intelligence... . Beyond all other means of appropriating truth, beyond all other organs of apprehension, is man's own action.
>
> (*LW* 4: 6, 7)

After this profound statement conjoining God as truth with humanity as knowers, Dewey fell silent about his own view of God for several decades. However, his elaboration of a Nature Philosophy continued. Major works during the 1920s, particularly *Human Nature and Conduct* and *Experience and Nature*, accounted for intelligence as a part of the natural world. Dewey never proposed a dual-aspect ontology or a property-dualistic ontology, he dismissed any Spinoza-style metaphysics, and he rejected metaphysical absolutism in all forms (including reductivist materialism). For Dewey, mind is thoroughly unified with nature, and that unity need not be a secret kept from mind. Not only can minds come to understand this unification with nature, intelligence can appreciate and pursue that natural unity.

The universe unified in intelligence

In *Experience and Nature* (1925), Dewey wrote, "[A] mind that has opened itself to experience and that has ripened through its discipline ... knows that its wishes and accomplishments are not the final measures of the universe." Yet mind's "power and achievement" still "implies a unity with the universe that is to be preserved" (*LW* 1: 313).

How can humanity preserve its unity with universe? "Fidelity to the nature to which we belong, as parts however weak, demands that we cherish our desires and ideals till we have converted them into intelligence, revised them in terms of the ways and means which nature makes possible" (*LW* 1: 314–315). Dewey regards intelligence as deeply intimate with nature, so that our cherished values can be realized through intelligent activity. To the extent that significant ends are objects of devout commitment, those ends must receive transmutation through intelligence to be intelligible—to be humanly realizable. The most realistic philosophy shall be the most idealistic, and the most idealistic philosophy shall be the most realistic.

Dewey's reconstruction of the realism-idealism dispute pre-dates his acquaintance with pragmatism. His worldview emerged from his undergraduate and graduate years, and it animated his writings during his first decade (1884–1894) as a professor. Science, not religion, guided this metaphysical reconstruction. His 1894 article "Reconstruction" proclaims that science has overturned the medieval picture of the world by depicting the world in terms of activities, causalities, forces, and energies occurring in space and time. No external metaphysical principle, power, or creator is needed. Everything that the cosmos requires, it has always possessed in abundance: "Now we see the universe as one all-comprehensive, interrelated scene of limitless life and motion. No bound can be put to it in imagination or in thought. No detail is so small that it is not a necessary part of the whole; no speck is apparently so fixed that it is not in reality a scene of energy" (*EW* 4: 102). On this vision, any existing thing has both particularity and interrelatedness: it is dynamic rather than static, and it is more like activity than rigidity. Vitality and life are no strangers to nature, and nature does not hide itself from mind. "Science has made real to us, and is bound to make still more real, the actual incarnation of truth in human experience and the necessity for giving heed to it" (*EW* 4: 103).

How does mind participate in this "incarnation of truth?" Dewey's understanding of the new empirical psychology convinced him that the field of mental life, the self, is just as dynamic and interactive as anything and everything else in the universe. His 1893 article titled "Self-Realization as the Moral Ideal" rejected conceiving the self as a schematic form. Dewey's substitute is "the self as always a concrete *specific* activity" and he stated that his goal is "to emphasize *the notion of a working or practical self* against that of a fixed or presupposed self" (*EW* 4: 43, 44, italics in

original). Dewey never saw any reason why the nature of the self must be radically different from, or opposed to, the environing processes around one's self. From his 1887 book *Psychology* we read,

> Mind has not remained a passive spectator of the universe, but has produced and is producing certain results. These results are objective, can be studied as all objective historical facts may be, and are permanent. They are the most fixed, certain, and universal signs to us of the way in which mind works. Such objective manifestations of mind, are, in the realm of intelligence, phenomena like language and science; in that of will, social and political institutions; in that of feeling, art; in that of the whole self, religion.
>
> (*EW* 2: 15)

In *Psychology* Dewey also affirmed that

> It needs only to be recognized that every act of knowledge is an intuition of truth, and that the goal of all knowledge is the complete intuition of truth, and that this truth is the complete manifestation of the unifying and distinguishing activities of the intelligence... . It is the intuition of God as perfectly realized intelligence that forms the cognitive side of the religious consciousness.
>
> (*EW* 1: 212)

The ideal of perfectly realized intelligence can be nothing other than the ultimate harmonization of intelligence's work with the natural world.

Dewey emphasized in his writings early and late that the only sort of intelligence capable of pursuing that harmonizing end is social intelligence manifested in social (ethical) institutions. Therefore, the ideal of realized ethical institutions is the same thing as the ideal of God. In Dewey's *Psychology*, religion guides the growth of the free individual within God's processes. Dewey's *A Common Faith* offers the same understanding of religion.

As Dewey began to formulate his psychological and philosophical views in more naturalist and pragmatist terminology, his core Nature Philosophy was not abandoned. By 1888 Dewey had judged that philosophy cannot justify the assertion of a rationalistic Absolute, and no longer treated "God" as that Absolute. By then, Dewey was seeking a third alternative between God as a projector of selves (but this God is too real and a threat to individuality) and God as a projection of selves (but that God is unreal and unmotivating for individuals). By 1893 Dewey was prepared to expressly claim that a perfect and unchanging God can play no real role in human intelligence or morality (*EW* 4: 159–161).

If the growth of the human mind is not a poor duplication of God's perfection, then the idealized community (as intelligence unified) is the spiritual ideal for each individual (as intelligence growing). The growth of human intelligence is not about representing for ourselves some perfect order. Nevertheless, human intelligence is capable of appreciating nature's order, because intelligence is participating in its reorganization. In 1898, Dewey's "Evolution and Ethics" points to the needed integration of individuality with naturality, and demands the progressive harmonization of humanity's ends with nature's ways:

> [T]he laws and conditions of righteousness are implicated in the working processes of the universe; when it is found that man in his conscious struggles, in his doubts, temptations,

> and defeats, in his aspirations and successes, is moved on and buoyed up by the forces which have developed nature; and that in this moral struggle he acts not as a mere individual but as an organ in maintaining and carrying forward the universal process.
>
> (*EW* 5: 53)

Although "Evolution and Ethics" does not mention God, this passage presages the definition of the religious character of experience in *A Common Faith*, and it clearly invokes "the universal process." The ethical advancement of humanity cannot be independent from the ongoing ways of environing nature: their integration is what Dewey here denotes as the "universal process." In 1908 Dewey first uses the term "natural piety" as "the sense of the permanent and inevitable implication of man and nature in a common career and destiny" (*MW* 4: 176). Could this universal process be that *Hen kai Pan*, the "One and All," which Lessing and Herder proclaimed to Jacobi?

Dewey and organicism

During Dewey's early period, he repeatedly encountered and absorbed German organicism, originating in Herder and Schelling. His own accounts of his formative years (1877–1879) as an undergraduate at the University of Vermont, and as a graduate student (1882–1884) at Johns Hopkins University, tell the tale.

Dewey recalled T. H. Huxley's *Elements of Physiology and Hygiene* from a junior-level physiology course, describing how he had derived from that textbook

> a sense of interdependence and interrelated unity that gave form to intellectual stirrings ... Subconsciously, at least, I was led to a desire a world and a life that would have the same properties as had the human organism in the picture of it derived from study of Huxley's treatment.
>
> (*LW* 5: 147–148)

Huxley's own philosophical sympathies were displayed in 1869 when he was asked to provide the first article of the inaugural issue of *Nature*. Huxley's offering was his translation of selected aphorisms on nature by Johann Wolfgang Goethe, prefaced by a line of pantheistic poetry from William Wordsworth. The first aphorism of Goethe as translated by Huxley reads: "Nature! We are surrounded and embraced by her: powerless to separate ourselves from her, and powerless to penetrate beyond her." A finer encapsulation of Nature Philosophy could not be desired.

Dewey also read about Goethe for himself while at Vermont, when he borrowed Eckermann's *Conversations with Goethe* from the university library (Good 2005: 103). He would have read Goethe's views on God's intimacy with Nature and God's endless productivity of Life, in expressions such as these:

> Nature and we men are so penetrated by the Divinity, that it holds us; we live, weave, and are in it; that we, under eternal laws, suffer and enjoy; that we practise them, and they are practised on us, whether we recognize them or not.
>
> (Eckermann 1874: 525)

Although Dewey may not have read Schelling during his university years, Goethe's intellectual debts to Schelling are ample and well-documented. Behind the *Naturphilosophie* of Goethe and Schelling stands the towering figure of Herder, as Frederick Beiser recounts:

> The most powerful and influential voice behind the new vitalism in Germany was Herder. His 1778 *Vom Erkennen und Empfinden der menschlichen Seele* argued that the mental and physical are simply different degrees of organization and development of organic force; and his *Gott, Einige Gespräche* (1786) took his vitalism one giant leap forward by applying it to Spinoza's substance, which was no longer a static thing but a living power, "the force of all forces."
>
> (Beiser 2009: 367)

That cosmically supreme source of all force is God, the All. Herder's *God, Some Conversations* boldly approved this Spinoza-like One and All worldview:

> He, the Self-dependent, is Power in the highest and only sense of the word, that is, the primal Force of all forces, the Soul of all souls. Without Him none of them came into being, without Him none are active, and all in their innermost connection express in every limitation, form, and appearance, His self-dependent nature, through which they all exist and work.
>
> (Herder 1940: 104)

This organicist view of nature dramatically transformed psychology, and Beiser credits Herder again:

> [T]he mind is not a disembodied spirit, but only the highest degree of organization and development of the physical powers of the body. It is important to see that this theory does not define the mind by what kind of thing or entity it is, but only by its distinctive purpose or function, which is to integrate, control, and organize all the various functions of the body.
>
> (Beiser 2009: 146)

Beiser then situates Schelling within this organicism:

> As Schelling metaphorically summarized this view in his first work on *Naturphilosophie*: "Nature should be visible spirit, spirit should be invisible nature." The young idealists then reinterpreted Spinoza's dual-attribute doctrine in such vitalist terms. Unlike Spinoza, the mental and the physical are no longer simply different perspectives, or different forms of explanation, of a single substance, which themselves cannot interact with one another. Rather, the mental and the physical refer to only different appearances, manifestations, or embodiments of a single living force... . The mental is not simply the effect of the physical, then, but its realization or development; conversely, the physical is not merely the effect of the mental, but its embodiment or organization.
>
> (Beiser 2009: 368)

Dewey's early organicism and mature naturalism was destined to become an elaboration of this insight into the mental and the physical, outlined by that concluding sentence to Beiser's account of *Naturphilosophie*.

Dewey became further acquainted with this organic worldview and functional psychology in his senior year course on moral philosophy. Professor H. A. P. Torrey, who once admitted his preference for pantheism to Dewey (*LW* 5: 148), required students to read Marsh's edition of Coleridge's *Aids to Reflection* and *The Remains of the Rev. James Marsh*. Marsh was among the first

American scholars to read Kant, Herder, and Schelling in their original German, not far behind Samuel Taylor Coleridge's similar precedent in England. Coleridge's studies of Schelling's *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature* and *On the World-Soul* did not tempt him into pantheism, but Schelling's view that nature and the self are composed of the same active powers allowed Coleridge to explain why practical reason could be entrusted with knowing nature (Hamilton 2007: 93–95; Hedley 2000).

Fifty-five years later, in 1941, Dewey recalled the crucial influence of Coleridge and Marsh. He particularly recalled how Marsh was conveying an Aristotelian view more than a Kantian view (*LW* 5: 185). Dewey's recollection is significant because that Aristotelian organicism was essential to German idealism's revolt against dualism, whether in the form of empiricism, materialism, or Kantianism. Marsh's collected essays in *The Remains* elaborate a sophisticated natural philosophy and proto-scientific psychology. Dewey appeals to Marsh in one of his earliest articles, "Soul and Body" (1886) to support his view that "soul" and "body" are related as "function and organ, as activity and instrument" (*EW* 1: 112), as Aristotle had proposed.

During his graduate studies at Johns Hopkins, he was the rapt student of another idealistic Aristotelian, George S. Morris. In 1917 Dewey had occasion to reminisce how Morris sought "a union of Aristotle, Fichte, and Hegel." Morris, Dewey recalled, only interpreted Hegel with "an abiding sense of what he was wont to term the organic relationship of subject and object, intelligence and the world" (*MW* 10: 11–1112). In 1889, after Morris's death, Dewey composed a study of his philosophy, emphasizing the abiding impact of Morris's studies in Germany under Friedrich Adolf Trendelenburg in Berlin (*EW* 3: 7).

Trendelenburg's influential Aristotelian revival, in the context of Germany's *Naturphilosophie* movement, was deeply indebted to Schelling (Beiser 2013: 32–33). Morris's own major work, *Philosophy and Christianity*, embraced Trendelenburg's main positions, starting from the Leibnizian principle that activity is the "essence of substantial existence," and affirming Aristotle's doctrine that activity—energy—constitutes being or reality. (This explains how Dewey came to accept Morris's invitation to write a book about Leibniz in 1886 for Morris's book series, Grigg's Philosophical Classics.) Like Trendelenburg, Morris repeatedly denied "a complete and essential mechanical separation between human and divine intelligence, or between 'human reason' and the divine mind" (Morris 1883: 263). He therefore flirted with pantheism just as the Vermont idealists did, by proposing that God's supreme spiritual activity is absolute being, of which any human person is a participating manifestation. However, like most seminary-trained intellectuals of his era, Morris never worked out a fully organicist metaphysics encompassing God.

Idealists of Dewey's generation, far less encumbered by theology, directly confronted the trilemma of either reducing personal selves to ineffective aspects of God, eliminating individuality by endorsing pantheism, or retreating to dualism to preserve human freedom. Dewey's organicism allowed him to deny key assumptions framing that idealist trilemma: (a) God possesses all powers; (b) God possesses all substantiality; and (c) causation is a necessary relation. If individual selves are related to each other and God as purposive organs of a body, then each self has particular ends and accomplishments not duplicated by others or the Godly whole. One can be one as a functional component of the All and sharing in the powers of the All while enjoying one's own existence and fulfilling limited ends not achievable by the All. One and All are co-related and co-dependent; neither could be what it really is without the other.

This organicism requires the reality of purpose, transformation, and growth at all levels, not excepting God. If God is too static, too mechanistic, or already comprises everything realizable, then component individuals cannot contribute any effective growth. Organic growth for persons implied God's growth, and all growth implies a relevant environs, for God as well as

ourselves. Dewey had to reject pantheism, instead affirming that God is always less than the totality of nature. Religiosity is concerned with a God at work within the world.

A friend to rational piety

Thomas Cogan reviewed Herder's *Gott, Einige Gespräche* for England's *Monthly Review* in 1792, extolling Herder as "a friend to rational piety." Cogan's Unitarianism explains that warm reception. Liberal theology generally embraced Herder, despite his pantheistic views on God's dynamism and growth:

> In a world in which everything changes, every force is in eternal activity, and hence in eternal metamorphosis of its organs. For this transformation itself is the expression of its indestructible activity, replete with wisdom, goodness and beauty.
>
> (Herder 1940: 187)

> Every blind force is infused with light, every lawless power with reason and goodness. None of its operations, no activity in creation was in vain. Thus there must be progress, advance in the realm of God, since there can be no standstill, and still less a regress.
>
> (Herder 1940: 189)

However comforting and inspiring this worldview may be, is it fully religious? Can religion rest on reason alone?

No one could mistake Herder for a rationalist in theology. Religion, for Herder, utilizes our capacities for imagining ideals and understanding nature. In his treatise *Von Religion, Lehrmeinungen, Gebrauchen* (1798) Herder asserts that religion is a conviction that comes from "our innermost consciousness of what we are as parts of the world, of what we ought to be and must do as human beings; this religion neither borrows nor expects its insight or its efficacy from any mathematical demonstration" (translation in Crowe 2009: 270).

Dewey recreates this view of religiosity inherited from Herder. His 1928–29 Gifford Lectures, titled *The Quest for Certainty*, connect his nature philosophy with religious psychology. Appreciating how mind's pursuit of ends is intertwined with nature's potentialities should inspire the further insight that everything worth living for must depend on nature.

> Religious faith which attaches itself to the possibilities of nature and associated living would, with its devotion to the ideal, manifest piety toward the actual ... Respect and esteem would be given to that which is the means of realization of possibilities, and to that in which the ideal is embodied if it ever finds embodiment ... Nature may not be worshiped as divine even in the sense of the intellectual love of Spinoza. But nature, including humanity, with all its defects and imperfections, may evoke heartfelt piety as the source of ideals, of possibilities, of aspiration in their behalf, and as the eventual abode of all attained goods and excellencies.
>
> (*LW* 4: 244)

The religious attitude proceeds from this piety towards the actual, but intelligence and piety are not enough for religiosity, as Dewey understands the religious. Pious respect is not yet motivating conviction. In *A Common Faith* he writes, "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" (*LW* 9: 19).

For both Herder and Dewey, the intellectual (what we actually are) and the idealizable (what we really want) must be fused with the moral (who we try to be) to produce the fully religious life. That intellectual/idealizable fusion lies in the realm of the aesthetic; the intellectual/moral fusion lies in the realm of the ethical; the idealizable/moral fusion lies in the realm of the mythical. Only their complete three-fold integration results in a devoutly religious life. Being religious is not just about God, but it depends on God. Here is Dewey's definition for God:

> A clear and intense conception of a union of ideal ends with actual conditions is capable of arousing steady emotion ... Whether one gives the name "God" to this union, operative in thought and action, is a matter for individual decision. But the function of such a working union of the ideal and the actual seems to me to be identical with the force that has in fact been attached to the conception of God in all religions that have a spiritual content; and a clear idea of that function seems to me urgently needed at the present time.
>
> (*LW* 9: 35)

Let us next compare this conception of God with Herder's, as Alex Englander explains it. "Herder, especially in *God*, adopts a theological conception of forces in the shape of God as *Urkraft*. In *God*, Herder substitutes "divine Kraft" for Spinoza's "God." The unity of the many forces the natural sciences reveal as explanatorily basic is the world's essential force, God. His manifestations in individual forces make his infinite attributes known to us (Englander 2013: 908–909). For Herder, God is Nature: God is all power and productivity; God is impersonal; God is dynamic growth; life is impermanent; and there is no personal immortality.

The resemblances between the God of Herder and the God of Dewey are now manifest.

The key naturalistic adjustment made by Dewey to Herder's God is the limitation of God to relevant natural forces that only include life's endeavors and the conditioning energies enveloping them. Dewey is neither a pantheist nor a panentheist. God is not all reality, and nothing about God is quite independent from life. God pervades and energizes everything life is and does, but God does not underlie or ground what the universe is doing. Dewey's God cannot be identified with "the mysterious totality of being the imagination calls the universe" (*LW* 9: 56).

Dewey's God permits his nature philosophy to fulfill the realized unity of the Ideal and Actual. Conceiving of God is not just an exercise of idealization nor is it an overreach of naturalization.

> We are in the presence neither of ideals completely embodied in existence nor yet of ideals that are mere rootless ideals, fantasies, utopias. For there are forces in nature and society that generate and support the ideals. They are further unified by the action that gives them coherence and solidity. It is this active relation between ideal and actual to which I would give the name "God."
>
> (*LW* 9: 34)

For Dewey, God is both the necessary *Urkraft* and the relevant *Umwelt* to humanity's existence, past and future. Taken to its ultimate conceivable extent, if all life anywhere is taken together, then God is also the *Uberwelt* for Life, for as long as Life endures. God may die. No ecologies are guaranteed to last forever.

This conception of God does not inspire religious optimism or pessimism. Once again, Dewey's nature philosophy allows us to transcend religious finalities and embrace an openness to the future. This much we can know: the universe is often favorable to intelligent action. So asserts our natural philosophy. That intellectual knowledge suffices for what we should do: continue the bold enterprise of life with reverence for our natural home. So avows our natural piety. That feeling of piety in turn guides how we may hope: devoting our lives to ethical ends can help realize a more ideal world for living well. So affirms our natural religiosity. That avowal of religiosity is the culminating organic fusion of intellect, feeling, and will promised by Dewey's early ethical idealism and fulfilled by his late naturalistic humanism.[3]

Together, natural intelligence, piety, and religiosity yields an answer to the question, what is humanity, that we should be mindful of it? God, in Dewey's hands, cannot be omitted from that answer.

> A clear and intense conception of a union of ideal ends with actual conditions is capable of arousing steady emotion. It may be fed by every experience, no matter what its material. In a distracted age, the need for such an idea is urgent. It can unify interests and energies now dispersed; it can direct action and generate the heat of emotion and the light of intelligence. Whether one gives the name "God" to this union, operative in thought and action, is a matter for individual decision. But the function of such a working union of the ideal and the actual seems to me to be identical with the force that has in fact been attached to the conception of God in all religions that have a spiritual content; and a clear idea of that function seems to me urgently needed at the present time.
>
> (*LW* 9: 35)

This God is not just any regulative ideal or set of high ideals, or an ideal vision of unified ideals. Nor is Dewey's God just the relation between ideals on the one hand and natural conditions on the other, as if those two things are separable and independent. Dewey takes every opportunity to emphasize how forces in nature and society generate and support ideals, ideals further unified by effective actions in that world lending them coherence and solidity. God is that organic relation uniting the ideal and actual, supplying the natural basis for a reasonable faith.

A naturally religious faith

We expect a religious person to place faith in something beyond oneself. However, for Dewey, that place is not God, or nature, or any knowable entity (*LW* 9: 23). Religious faith proceeds from piety towards the natural, but one does not thereby place faith in the natural. In *The Quest for Certainty*, Dewey describes religious faith as attentive to, and pious towards, the natural.

> Religious faith which attaches itself to the possibilities of nature and associated living would, with its devotion to the ideal, manifest piety toward the actual ... Nature and society include within themselves projection of ideal possibilities and contain the operations by which they are actualized. Nature may not be worshipped as divine even in the sense of the intellectual love of Spinoza. But nature, including humanity, with all its defects and imperfections, may evoke heartfelt piety as the source of ideals, of possibilities, of aspiration in their behalf, and as the eventual abode of all attained goods and excellencies.
>
> (*LW* 4: 244)

Natural piety has a natural object, accessible to anyone capable of that imaginative overview of life. However, natural piety lacks one crucial feature that dominates religious faith: the personal commitment of individual persons to recreate themselves for the advancement of ethical ideals they deem worthy.

What is religious faith and where should it be directed? Dewey's answer is, "I should describe this faith as the unification of the self through allegiance to inclusive ideal ends, which imagination presents to us and to which the human will responds as worthy of controlling our desires and choices" (*LW* 9: 23). Faith has an object because it arises from a prior stage of natural piety, but religious faith per se is not about an object. Religious faith seeks an objective, a future objective that includes one's own self as a phase of its development.

A person of natural piety appreciates how there are many human ideals all potentially realizable, and many have been of benefit to one's own life. Yet that contemplative appreciation is not the same as making a personal ethical commitment to furthering any of those ideals into the future. Dewey clearly thinks that the cultivation of natural piety should develop a person towards the fully ethical life, and he holds that the religious life cannot be lived without natural piety. But he does not equate natural piety towards what is actual with ethical religiosity. Nor does he equate faith in some set of moral ideals with genuine religiosity. Taking piety about the actual or faith about the ideal as sufficient for religiosity returns to the dualism against which Dewey warns. Only their organic unification suffices for genuine religiosity, but that unification must occur in one place: the moral growth of the individual self who seeks that unification. Neither the natural nor the ideal will accomplish that for us.

In *A Common Faith* Dewey expects religious faith to be personally transformative by ethically unifying the self in addition to imaginatively unifying the world.

> What has been said does not imply that all moral faith in ideal ends is by virtue of that fact religious in quality. The religious is "morality touched by emotion" only when the ends of moral conviction arouse emotions that are not only intense but are actuated and supported by ends so inclusive that they unify the self. The inclusiveness of the end in relation to both self and the "universe" to which an inclusive self is related is indispensable.
>
> (*LW* 9: 16)

For Dewey, the ethical life is unifiable with the religious life only when and where people devote themselves to fully inclusive ends: ends which are simultaneously (a) realizable through intelligent living within cooperative nature and (b) realizable through self-transforming social action. Pursuing just one or the other falls short of the religious life. There are innumerable ways to enjoy one's life intelligently and piously without the ethical integrity that Dewey recommends, and there are innumerable ways to sacrifice one's life whole-heartedly and fanatically without the intelligent practicality that he also recommends. Neither the pious but dissolute life nor the fanatical but fruitless life can truly be the religious life, and Dewey had nothing but scorn for the third alternative, the life of the idealist passively entranced by unreal and unrealizable ends.

The object of natural piety alone is not God for Dewey. Conceiving God as "the" Uberwelt, as a pre-unified substantial being, and then attempting to identify one's ends with this Uberwelt's ends (as far as we can imagine what those might be), may be a type of religious naturalism but it cannot by itself engender the religious life. That sort of God may be growing with or without us, and it may be using us while not really needing us. Such divine independence might elevate it to a status worthy of a God in the eyes of many, but allowing our ethics to depend on

this God is highly questionable. Dewey accordingly rejects the speculative postulation of God as an already unified set of pro-active powers, and spurns submission to such a God as unworthy of humanity.[4]

Dewey reverses the priority of ontology over axiology. Only our own ethical ideals, when we can wholly commit our lives to potentially realizable values, should control what counts as God-in-nature. Each individual is, insofar as s/he is religious, not just a component of God by living intelligently, but also a vital contribution to the growth of God-with-nature. This God is intellectually knowable, aesthetically congenial, and ethically admirable—and so is humanity by living religiously within this God.

Notes

1 References to the *Collected Works* of Dewey (1967–1990) are indicated by *EW* (*Early Works*), *MW* (*Middle Works*), or *LW* (*Later Works*) followed by volume and page numbers.
2 Rockefeller (1991: 518–520) accurately describes Dewey's naturalistic God. William Rowe (2007) accepts that theistic vs. idealistic dichotomy, and decides that Dewey confusingly offers two Gods, one ideal and one natural. Pihlström (2013) substitutes a Kantian dichotomy of constructivism vs. realism instead, deciding that Dewey's God is transcendentally "real" only within practices that are already religious.
3 In Dewey's words, "What humanism means to me is an expansion, not a contraction, of human life, an expansion in which nature and the science of nature are made the willing servants of human good" (*LW* 5: 266).
4 See for example Dewey's criticisms of Henry Wieman's proposed God (*LW* 9: 200).

References

Beiser, F. (2009) *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Beiser, F. (2013) *Late German Idealism: Trendelenburg and Lotze*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Crowe, B. (2009) "Beyond Theological Rationalism: The Contemporary Relevance of Herder's Psychology of Religion," *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 21, 249–273.
Dewey, J. (1967–90) *The Collected Works of John Dewey*, ed. J. A. Boydston, Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.
Eckermann, J. P. (1874) *Conversations of Goethe with Eckermann and Soret*, new edition, trans. J. Oxenford, London: George Bell and Sons.
Englander, A. (2013) "Herder's Expressivist Metaphysics and the Origins of German Idealism," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 21, 902–924.
Good, J. A. (2005) *A Search for Unity in Diversity: The 'Permanent Hegelian Deposit' in the Philosophy of John Dewey*, Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.
Hamilton, P. (2007) *Coleridge and German Philosophy: The Poet in the Land of Logic*, London: Continuum.
Hedley, D. (2000) *Coleridge, Philosophy and Religion: Aids to Reflection and the Mirror of the Spirit*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Herder, J. G. (1940) *God, Some Conversations*, trans. F. Burkhardt, Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill.
Morris, G. S. (1883) *Philosophy and Christianity*, New York: Robert Carter and Bros.
Pihlström, S. (2013) "Deweyan Pragmatic Religious Naturalism," in *Pragmatic Pluralism and the Problem of God,* New York: Fordham University Press, 2013, pp. 47–72.
Rockefeller, S. (1991) *John Dewey: Religious Faith and Democratic Humanism*, New York: Columbia University Press.
Rowe, W. (2007) "Religion within the Bounds of Naturalism: Dewey and Wieman," in *William L. Rowe on Philosophy of Religion: Selected Writings*, ed. N. Trakakis, Aldershot, UK: Ashgate.
Shook, J. R. (2011) "Varieties of Twentieth Century American Naturalism," *The Pluralist* 6 (2), 1–17.
Shook, J. R., and J. A. Good. (2010) *John Dewey's Philosophy of Spirit, with Dewey's 1897 Lectures on Hegel*, New York: Fordham University Press.
Yasukata, T. (2002) *Lessing's Philosophy of Religion and the German Enlightenment*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.