Part 1 – Naturalism and Classical American Philosophy

In spite of its having been part of the philosophical landscape of this country for over a century, and despite repeated attempts at a precise enumeration of its principles, naturalism remains woefully misunderstood. One reason for this is that naturalism “means many different things to many different people” (Sklar 2001, 1). Or, as William Alston once grumbled,

The woods are teeming with those who would provide "naturalistic" construals of intentional psychological states, moral and other evaluative facts, epistemic statuses, and much else. Whatever we talk about must be given naturalistic credentials or be consigned to the flames, if, indeed, flames themselves are naturalistically respectable…. Most of those who march under the naturalist banner in philosophy of mind, in ethics, in epistemology, in metaphysics simply use the term unselﬁconsciously, apparently supposing that it wears its meaning on its face (Alston, 2002)

Even those more inclined toward the view have likewise complained about the banality of the term in contemporary philosophical circles (e.g. Stroud 1996, Friedman 1997).

Naturalism has also retroactively been applied to a staggering range of philosophies of the past. To wit, in the editors’ introduction to a recent collection on naturalism one finds the following:

Naturalism has deep roots in the history of philosophical and scientiﬁc thought… It can be traced back to the ﬁrst pre-Socratic philosophers… It even included Aristotle… [and] a wide range of thinkers historically, including Epicurus and Lucretius, Spinoza and Voltaire, Galileo and Darwin. Indeed, modern philosophy… from Bacon and Hobbes, to Locke and Hume, Kant and Russell (Shook & Kurtz 2009).

It appears naturalism is a broad church, indeed. But, it is one thing for a thinker to present naturalistic themes in his or her work and quite another to be a self-proclaimed naturalist. It seems clear from all of this that “naturalism [itself] is a thoroughly historicized distinction: it has evolved in dramatically diverse ways, following the contours of philosophical fashion. It cannot possibly mean the same thing or raise the same puzzles for (say) Aristotle and ourselves” (Margolis, 2009).
The number of volumes (*e.g.* Craig & Moreland 2000, Shook 2003, De Caro & Macarthur 2004, Goetz & Taliaferro 2008, Shook & Kurtz 2009, De Caro & Macarthur 2010, De Caro & Putnam 2016) devoted to explicating, re-envisioning, or refuting various naturalisms for the 21st century stand as evidence of the need for clarification. Regardless of the new directions these projects may forge, several things are clear. First, for better or worse, naturalism promises to be a major part of the future of American thought. Second, it remains in dire need of disambiguation, as it can be used to refer to any number of epistemological, metaphysical, or ethical positions. And finally, the conversation between philosophical proponents and opponents of naturalism, if it is to move forward, must find some common ground.

While bearing on these larger issues, the scope of this paper will be limited to a patchwork of ideas developed and advanced in the United States during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, particularly those of two self-proclaimed naturalists, *viz.* John Dewey and George Santayana. Although these thinkers shared a number of metaphysical and epistemological views, when it came to the application of these ideas toward religious themes each forged his own path. One simple explanation might be that each man was raised under fairly disparate religious conditions. Dewey was born to third-generation Vermonters who attended a church of Congregationalist denomination, which was known for its preference for the autonomy of local congregations over centralized governance. Santayana spent the first eight years of his life in Spain and was raised Roman Catholic. However, he continued to attend Mass regularly until his death, even after proclaiming himself an atheist as a young adult.

While these early experiences certainly helped to shape the views each man held, the key stimuli in the development of their naturalistic systems were philosophical. Dewey’s early influences were Kantian and neo-Hegelian, but toward the middle of his career he became more attracted to Darwinian insights, which he believed, “introduced a mode of thinking that in the end was bound to transform the logic of knowledge, and hence the treatment of morals, politics, and religion” (Dewey 1907, 3). He came to call his mature position ‘cultural’ or ‘humanistic Naturalism’ and sought to shift focus away from religion as an institution toward ‘the religious’ as shared experience. (cf. Eldridge 1996). Santayana, on the other hand, claimed religion to be “certainly significant…but not literally true,” yet advanced religion as an “embodiment of reason” – *i.e.* he saw both reason and religion as attempts to order the world and “emancipat[e]
man from his personal limitations” (Santayana 1905/1998, 179). Santayana argued that religion, as a conveyer of tradition, was a vital institution in any society. He believed that the aesthetic, poetic elements of the religious experience were essential for a full human life. Dewey saw faith as a particular ‘species-trait’ with the potential to transform society once freed from its institutional shackles. Santayana believed faith was a necessary prerequisite for reason, one which developed the capacity for working with symbols, and declared what he called ‘animal faith’ the precondition for knowledge. Each naturalized faith by tapping into the philosophical currents of their shared milieu. Each saw the value in faith toward various ends.

In order to situate their respective positions historically, I will sketch the immediate influences on their intellectual development from the pragmatists Charles Sanders Peirce and William James. The philosophical era in which these four men lived has been called “The Golden Age of American Philosophy” (Frankel 1960). Although two (Peirce and James) were theists and two (Dewey and Santayana) were atheists, all four were connected personally and intellectually. Peirce and James had been friends at Cambridge; while Dewey had studied with Peirce at Johns Hopkins and Santayana had studied with James at Harvard. Peirce, James, and Dewey were the three main exponents of pragmatism, while Santayana and Dewey had numerous heated exchanges over their brands of naturalism. But, most importantly, these thinkers each tried to ease these tensions between science and religion by defining faith as necessary to human life.

Because of this common legacy, it should be no surprise that the ontological upshots of naturalism were wedded to the epistemological insights of pragmatism. I shall discuss how Dewey and Santayana applied these toward a view of human nature and action theory that included faith. Although Dewey was the only one of these three to adopt the Peircean term ‘inquiry,’ and the only self-proclaimed naturalist and pragmatist, I believe his ‘transactional inquiry’ shares much in common with both James’ ‘will to believe’ and Santayana’s ‘animal faith.’ Such comparisons should support my ultimate thesis that naturalism in the 21st century can and should value faith as something necessary to human life without necessarily having to commit to anything supernatural. Thus, I will first outline why, and how, early American

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1 I have also chosen these thinkers because all four were public philosophers who wrote for popular, as well as academic, audiences and engaged the civic issues of their time.
naturalists made room for faith in their own philosophical systems and then shift my attention to how these insights can be turned toward the popular controversies being driven by the New Atheists and others.

**Part 2 – Why Dewey and Santayana Naturalized Faith**

The naturalism that American thinkers like Dewey and Santayana had in mind rejected dualistic ontology and posited a dynamic view of reality that emphasized temporality and change, as well as a commingling of ontology with human experience. As John Ryder has summed it up, the difference between the scientistic, epistemically-centered naturalism advanced in many circles today and the naturalism they presented, can be seen as turning on four central theses. These are:

1. The phenomena of the world have definable traits.
2. The traits of these phenomena can be understood.
3. Understanding is always conditioned and perspectival.
4. Human interaction with the rest of the world, cognitive or otherwise, is active and creative (Ryder 2003, 66).

Dewey and Santayana would likely have subscribed to all four of these statements, whereas newer forms of naturalism usually hold to the first two. Public intellectuals in the sciences have denounced defenders of the latter two statements and philosophical naturalists of the more recent stripe have sometimes joined such condemnations. The explanation for why naturalists like Dewey and Santayana should subscribe to all of the above theses, where contemporary naturalists are sometimes loathe to do so, also reveals why the older naturalists were more amenable to faith and religious experience in their own systems. The answer turns on several historical factors, as their theories drew from a rich repository of naturalistic themes from various traditions. Painting with the broadest of strokes, one can identify at least three major influences – *viz.* ancient Greek organicism, protestant transcendentalism, and the pragmatic inquiry of Peirce and James.

*Ancient Greek Organicism*

As John P. Anton has pointed out, “The naturalizing of religion abounds in the polytheism of the ancient Greeks… the gods, their existence, and their interaction with humans were taking place within the natural world” (Anton 2009, 156). Over and above this physical continuity
between the godly and human realms, early Greek philosophy is colored by a picture of the universe, the *kosmos*, as both alive and orderly:

The ‘Nature’ of which the first philosophers tell us with confident dogmatism is from the first a metaphysical entity; not merely a natural element, but an element endowed with supernatural life and powers, a *substance* which is also *Soul* and *God*. It is that very living stuff out of which daemons, Gods, and souls had slowly gathered shape. It is that same continuum of homogeneous matter, charged with vital force, which had been the vehicle of magical sympathy, that now is put forward explicitly, with the confident tone of an obvious statement, as the substrate of all things and the source of their growth. (Cornford, 1957, p. 123)

The consequences of this view held deep implications for how human beings were thought to relate to the world around them – experientially, epistemically, and ethically – and became the core of their philosophical considerations. As Werner Jaeger has noted, the ancient Greeks, in general, always had “an innate sense of the natural,” wherein, “they had looked at the world with the steady gaze that did not see any part of it as separate and cut off from the rest, but always as an element in a living whole” (Jaeger 1986, xx). The American naturalists developed a similar ‘organic point of view,’ albeit one informed by Darwin rather than Aristotle. This led them to a more embodied and biological analysis of the intersection between experience and ontology than their enlightenment predecessors.

Santayana employed these notions first by publishing the five volumes of his *The Life of Reason* between 1905 and 1906. There he claimed to build on the legacy of Plato and Aristotle by showing, “everything ideal has a natural basis and everything natural an ideal development” (Santayana, 1905, p. 21). Dewey embraced Greek organism more gradually, though, having received doses at Johns Hopkins from Peirce and G.S. Morris, at Chicago from G.H. Mead and Jane Addams, and then later at Columbia from F.J.E. Woodbridge. Slowly, the naturalist reading of the classics began to infiltrate mainstream scholarship in the States. As Whitehead would put it in his 1927-8 Gifford Lectures, “if we had to render Plato’s general point of view

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2 Going back to his graduate work at Johns Hopkins, Dewey was heavily influenced by the neo-Hegelianism of Morris, who rejected the dialectic of *Geist* in favor of a more Aristotelian, biological description of the dynamism of nature, as well as C.S. Peirce, who, “by his own account emerged from the German fog primarily by the assistance of Aristotle” (Veazie 1961, p. 4). In her autobiographical account of her work at Hull House, Addams wrote of organizing Hellenic festivals, where classical philosophers and playwrights would be read and discussed (Addams, 1910). Renewed scholarly interest in Mead has revealed a deeper interest in the development of classical philosophy than previously realized. In fact, it seems that he was working, during the 1890s when he and Dewey were colleagues, on a book-length manuscript regarding the “origins of Greek speculation.”
with the least changes made necessary by the intervening two thousand years of human experience… we should have to set about the construction of a philosophy of organism. (Whitehead, 1929/1978, p. 39)

**Protestant Transcendentalism**

Among the many things to which the naturalists were responding was the rift between science and religion that had begun during the European renaissance, two major products of which were the Protestant Reformation and the advent of humanism. The challenges made by the Reformation to ecclesiastic corruption helped to shift the significance of religious practice away from established doctrine toward the personal experience of the worshipper, while humanism supplanted the epistemic authority of the divine with the idea that human beings could identify truth, goodness, and beauty themselves. “With the growth of the sciences and the emancipation of the arts, both heralding new freedoms, saving Christianity from the rigidities of outdated dogma took the form of a philosophical desideratum” (Anton 2009, 158). In these ways, the great debate between modern rationalism and empiricism was as much about faith as it was epistemology.

Of course, Kant’s critical philosophy aimed at meliorating the problems that Modern debate.³ Kant’s solution was to convert transcendence to transcendentalism, thus unifying the epistemology of humanism and the Protestant view of a personal relationship with God. This innovation reached American shores in the early 19th century via the work of Coleridge and played a major role in the rise of what some have called ‘the American Renaissance,’ driven by the transcendentalism of Emerson, Thoreau, and Margaret Fuller (cf. Matthiessen 1941). In defining the movement, Emerson wrote, “What is popularly called Transcendentalism among us, is Idealism... It is well known to most of my audience that the Idealism of the present day acquired the name Transcendental from the use of that term by Immanuel Kant” (Emerson 1842).

Emerson’s Unitarian transcendentalism still held sway in Cambridge when James, his godson, joined a philosophical club at Harvard with Peirce and some of their fellow classmates

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³ On his view, rationalism failed because, without a theory of perception, it could not offer an account of the *a priori* without falling prey to a *reductio*. On the other hand, empiricism failed because it could not account for how a simple stream of sensory datum, without concepts, could offer a robust understanding of the world.
(cf. Menand 2001). Although James later would argue that pragmatism was best served in going around Kant rather than through him, and largely ignored the Kantian components of Peirce’s thought, Dewey clearly saw the importance Kant had held for Peirce. In “The Development of American Pragmatism,” he attributed the origin of pragmatism to a passage in Kant’s *Metaphysics of Morals*, happened upon by Peirce, wherein,

Kant established a distinction between *pragmatic* and *practical*. The latter term applies to moral laws which Kant regards as *a priori*, whereas the former term applies to the rules of art and technique which are based on experience and are applicable to experience (Dewey 1925b, 3).

Peirce himself was keen to acknowledge the effect that Kant had on his thinking. He wrote, “Kant (whom I more than admire) is nothing but a somewhat confused pragmatist” (Peirce 1931-5, 525).

*The Pragmatic Inquiry of Peirce and James*

Peirce’s primary concern in his work on inquiry was finding a scientific means of streamlining the acquisition of knowledge, and so for him pragmatism was first and foremost an epistemological method, but one always directed towards clarifying ontology and truth. In his essay “How to Make our Ideas Clear” Peirce, who “by his own account emerged from the German fog primarily by the assistance of Aristotle,” echoed claims about final causes found in the latter’s *Metaphysics* (Veazie 1961, p. 4). Peirce advised:

Consider what effects, which might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then, our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object (Peirce 1931-5, 5.402).

This statement became known as “the pragmatic maxim” and illustrated how Peirce’s version of pragmatism was primarily a criterion for rigorously clarifying concepts.

Peirce viewed James’ radical empiricism as akin to his work, with only “a certain difference in the point of view” 1931-5, 5.414). This is an important insight for understanding the Jamesian position. It is clear from their writings that neither man considered himself a naturalist, yet, James was less inclined toward such a moniker, partly due to his rejection of Kantian notions in favor of an Anglophone framework and partly to his religious/mystical proclivities. Nevertheless, James’ radical empiricism, though arrived at from a different avenue
and still with its spiritual commitments, contains several naturalistic themes. (Cf. Gale 1997). Most significant is James’ attack on the alleged ‘inner duplicity’ of earlier forms of empiricism. As he wrote, “thoughts and things are absolutely homogenous as to their material… their opposition is only one of relation and of function. There is no thought-stuff different from thing-stuff” (James 1977, 272).

As early as 1890, in a chapter of his The Principles of Psychology entitled “The Stream of Thought,” James began working out the details of his radical empiricism. He defended a holistic and fluid view of consciousness that rejected the foundational concept of an ego while at the same time unwittingly affirmed the upshots of Kant’s transcendental unity of apperception. He wrote,

Now I do not wish just yet to ‘commit myself’ about the existence or non-existence of the ego, but I do contend that we need not invoke it for this particular reason – namely because the manifold of ideas has to be reduced to unity. There is no manifold of coexisting ideas; the notion of such a thing is a chimera. Whatever things are thought in a relation are thought from the outset in a unity, in a single pulse of subjectivity, a single psychosis, feeling, or state of mind (James 1977, 64-5; his emphasis).

James developed this idea over the next fifteen years, mentioning it by name in a preface to his The Will to Believe (1897). By denying supernatural elements in his theory of knowledge, James hoped to dissolve the traditional epistemological distinction between knower and known. For him, a conception of a knower only arises after the smoothness of the stream of experience has been disrupted. At such moments, purpose temporarily supplants ‘pure experience’ and the resultant outcropping might be called the ‘ego’ or ‘knowing subject.’ In this way, James was able to tie together his radical empiricism with his pragmatism. The result was an account of pragmatic inquiry underwritten by an empiricism that turned away from non-natural explanations with regard praxeology, yet maintained a non-natural notion of axiology.

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4 James finally published a series of essays on the topic between 1904 and 1905, which were collected and republished posthumously under the title Essays in Radical Empiricism (1912). Perhaps the most well-known and representative essay among that series was entitled “A World of Pure Experience.” Therein, he stated, “I give the name of ‘radical empiricism’ to my weltanschauung… To be radical, an empiricism must neither admit into its constructions any element that is not directly experienced, nor exclude from them any element that is directly experienced” (James 1977, 195).
James had painted himself into a philosophical corner. If everything is viewed as a matter of natural, immediate experience, one will be hard pressed to ground the subjectivity of religious belief without reinstituting a Berkeleyan sort of idealism. James found his escape by applying the German tradition to the Peircean take on belief as a habit of action, repurposing the ‘will’ of Kant, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche to fit the bill. According to his ‘will to believe,’ one is justified in believing in one part of a genuine option whenever said belief can bear fruit in our life. Since the option between theism and atheism is a genuine one, James concluded one ought to will to believe in religious tenets because doing so would pay dividends in everyday life. One must, he claimed, make an inquiry into both sides of a genuine option and choose that which possesses the ‘cash value’ to make one’s life more significant.

The preceding points also help elucidate passages from James’s *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, such as, “One may say truly, I think, that personal religious experience has its root and centre in mystical states of consciousness” (James 1902, 368). According to James, although mystical experiences are ineffable, transient, and passive, they yet carry a ‘noetic quality’ that provides access to a specialized kind of truth – one he equated with ‘significance.’ Such truths, though individual and ultimately unpersuasive to others, are the most profound and personally concrete.\(^5\) *The Will to Believe* continued his psychological account of religious practice and offered a functional understanding of faith.\(^6\) Yet, it legitimized supernaturalism as ‘meaningful’ instead of ‘true,’ and the value of faith remained confined to a merely strategic thinking about day-to-day living.

The upshot of these historical points is that Dewey and Santayana had gleaned a view of nature from the Greeks that saw neither as exclusively comprised of matter, nor merely of that

\(^5\) This was a belief which he had defended elsewhere in relation to other sorts of personal situations. As he wrote in 1899, “Every Jack sees in his own particular Jill charms and perfections to the enchantment of which we stolid onlookers are stone-cold. And which has the superior view of the absolute truth, he or we? ...surely to Jack are the profounder truths revealed; surely poor Jill's palpitating little life-throbs are among the wonders of creation, are worthy of this sympathetic interest... For Jack realizes Jill concretely, and we do not.... Jill, who knows her inner life, knows that Jack's way of taking it— so importantly—is the true and serious way; and she responds to the truth in him by taking him truly and seriously, too. May the ancient blindness never wrap its clouds about either of them again! (James 1977, 645-6). Such “inner-revealed truth” is the scaffolding on which the central thesis of *The Will to Believe* was built.

\(^6\) It is telling that the subtitle of the work is *A Study in Human Nature* since, as he put it in a letter to Ms. Frances Morse regarding his goal, “to make the reader believe that although all the special manifestations of religion may have been absurd (I mean its creeds and theories), yet the life of it as a whole is mankind's most important function” (quoted in Anton 2009, 163).
which can be perceived, but instead saw it as an organic system of interrelated elements comprising a unified whole, within which the totality of causal relations must be restricted to the natural realm. By making experience the centerpiece of their analyses, they echoed the transcendentalists’ religious shift from impersonal doctrine to personal relationship with the divine. And, despite Santayana’s disavowal of the pragmatist label, both thinkers embraced the pragmatic conclusions made by Peirce and James regarding inquiry and experience. In what follows I will show how each figure combined these thoughts in his own system in order to naturalize faith.

Part 3 – How Dewey and Santayana Naturalized Faith

Despite their shared intellectual background and in spite of the similarities between their views, Dewey and Santayana often took issue with one another’s version of naturalism. Santayana even went so far as to call the naturalism presented in Dewey’s *Experience and Nature* (1925) ‘half-hearted’ and ‘short-winded’ to which Dewey responded by calling Santayana’s ‘broken-backed.’ Though, much of the disagreement stemmed from their respective theories of experience, it would be beyond the scope of this paper to recount those now. Several authors have given good accounts of the debate (e.g. Comstock 1965, Shook 2002, Dilworth 2003). Comstock summarizes it best:

…it is their agreement that is the necessary precondition for the meaningful conflict between them. The area of agreement is their common understanding of two presuppositions of thought that they agree are the bases of a naturalistic philosophy first, the principle of the biological and physical conditions of consciousness, thought, and value, and, second, the principle of the continuity of all natural events. The point of disagreement is the conviction each expresses that the other has failed to adhere consistently to one or both of these principles. (Comstock 1965, 119; emphasis added).

Santayana felt Dewey’s book had hypostatized perception due to an enchantment with the ‘foreground of experience’ at the cost of the ‘background of nature’ (cf. Santayana 1925). Stated differently, Santayana believed that Dewey fell into a naïve-realism, wherein memories, reflection, and abstract reason were trampled under a tyranny of the present. Suffice it to say the proximity of their views must have bred some contempt.
But what Dewey and Santayana both failed to see was their differences had more to do with a theory of human nature and a philosophy of action than it did a theory of experience. As Dewey would put it in his response to Santayana,

Experience, thus conceived, constitutes, in Santayana's happy phrase, a foreground. But it is the foreground of nature... Apparently he conceives of the foreground as lying between human intuition and experience and the background; to me human experiencing is the foreground, nature's own... So I repeat that while 'consciousness' is foreground in a preeminent sense, experience is much more than consciousness and reaches down into the background as that reaches up into experience (Dewey 1927b, 76-8, emphasis added).

With this Dewey hit upon the key. For Santayana, there was something which resided between nature and intuition – viz. Spirit. But, by using this term, Santayana did not intend to belie his naturalism. Instead, he used it in a specialized sense to refer to a functional consciousness that harmonizes impulses in action and makes it possible for one to grasp essence, i.e. the conditions for the possibility of existence. As he put it in connection to aesthetic essences,

The aesthetic effect of objects is always due to the total emotional value of the consciousness in which they exist... it is the essential privilege of beauty to so synthesise [sic.] and bring to a focus the various impulses of the self... In the experience of these momentary harmonies we have the basis of the enjoyment of beauty, and of all its mystical meanings. (Santayana 1896, 129).

But, on Dewey’s view, the intuitive traits of an experience are neither essences nor primitives, but arise instead from the commerce of organisms and environments; i.e. they arise from the ‘situation.’

An exploration of their views of human nature helps to elucidate this distinction. Again, the ideas of Peirce and James loom large, since both attempted to embed faith in an account of experience. Peirce had argued against typically religious methods of ‘fixing belief’ early in his career, yet in the 1908 article, “A Neglected Argument for the Reality of God,” he approached the naturalizing of faith by combining the logic of abduction with the ‘three Universes of Experience’ of his semiotics. The central concept in this essay was a faculty of ‘religious sensitivity’ he called ‘Musement,’ which he described as the “pure play and lively exercise of one's power” (Peirce 1931-5, 6.458). After analyzing its operation in terms of an active, animal impulse, he confusedly fell back upon the classic Aristotelean function argument and asks: “what
is man's proper function if it be not to embody general ideas in art-creations, in utilities, and above all in theoretical cognition?” (Peirce 1931-5, 6.476). This left Peirce grasping at explanatory straws. His conclusion makes vague appeal to convention and physiology insofar as the faith any “normal man” has in common sense and instinct would lead him to “be stirred to the depths of his nature by the beauty of the idea [of the Reality of God] and by its august practicality” (Peirce 1931-5, 6.467).

James likewise ushered Dewey and Santayana toward naturalizing faith by including it in his account of functional psychology. In The Principles of Psychology, James was mainly concerned with scientifically describing the role of the mind in human behavior, and thus devoted most of his attention there to the relationship between simple sensations, habits, and more complex states like emotion. Though he mentions impulse frequently there, like Peirce, he hardly distinguishes it from reactive, animal instinct. He intended The Varieties of Religious Experience to extend this line of research and establish ‘a science of religion,’ but his theory lacked a robust conative account of faith. Though he muses about impulse: “The love of life, at any and every level of development, is the religious impulse,” the concept remains woefully undefined as he devotes his attention to explicating what he called the ‘faith-state,’ a passive state of preparation and reception tantamount to mystical meditation. In this way, his account fails to fully integrate faith with in his philosophy of action.

To a large extent Dewey and Santayana followed these leads, each grounding their theory in the functional relationship between impulses, habits, and reason. While structurally similar, each functioned in its own way. Dewey’s main concern was what he called habit-reconstruction – the outcome of intelligent inquiries within problematic situations. As such, impulse is largely cast in a supporting role throughout his corpus, with his fullest treatment coming in the second part of his Human Nature and Conduct (1922). There Dewey stated, “Habits as organized activities are secondary and acquired, not native and original. They are outgrowths of unlearned activities which are part of man's endowment at birth…[yet] …In conduct the acquired is the primitive. Impulses although first in time are never primary in fact; they are secondary and dependent” (Dewey 1922, 65). Habits, on this view, are pulled from the front by biological and

7 The closest James comes to offering such an account is perhaps his early essay, “Reflex Action and Theism” (1881), although it is couched in terms of the “triadic structure of impression, reflection, and reaction” (James 1896, 116).
social factors, rather than pushed from behind by factors that were traditionally explained in the language of physics or theology. In other words, Dewey believed that human beings were ‘creatures of habit,’ but he saw habits as potentialities that were antecedent to experience rather than byproducts of rote action. Habits, for Dewey, are ‘pulled from the front’ insofar as they are only fixed by their fruitfulness in attaining future ends, much as genetic mutations in species are fixed only when they provide some marginal aid in adapting to environmental changes. In his words,

> the meaning of native activities is not native; it is acquired. It depends upon interaction with a matured social medium… Impulses are the pivots upon which the re-organization of activities turn, they are agencies of deviation, for giving new directions to old habits and changing their quality. Consequently whenever we are concerned with understanding social transition and flux or with projects for reform, personal and collective, our study must go to analysis of native tendencies… Any impulse may become organized into almost any disposition according to the way it interacts with surroundings. (Dewey 1922, 66-9).

But, if habit is the outcome of inquiry and impulses are what one finds already on the scene in a human being, then, as we shall see, Dewey is left with a tension in his account of faith.

> Like James, Dewey sought to free ‘the religious’ in experience from the doctrines and institutions of ‘religion.’ But, unlike James, who looked toward what made religious experiences unique, Dewey sought the features they had in common with all other experiences. He argued any experience had the capacity to become a religious one, and that what made it religious in tone was not the ‘will’ to accept it as a working hypothesis, but depended entirely on the long term effect it retroactively had on one’s life. Even life altering experiences could only be said to be religious from the vantage point of a re-ordered life, i.e. after they had occurred.

> The underlying aims of this move were decidedly aesthetic. In his *Art as Experience*, published that same year, Dewey had called such experiences ‘consummatory’ and argued that the meaning they take on is filled in by subsequent experiences, which hang on how the organism’s habits are affected by the consummation. By stripping the non-natural elements from the traditional view of the sublime, Dewey hoped to salvage the ‘power’ of art without appeal to notions like ‘genius.’
But, in *A Common Faith*, Dewey identified three ways that an organism could alter behavior toward an experience, *viz.* accommodation, adaptation, and adjustment. Accommodation occurs when an organism submits to the conditioning environment, adaptation when it changes the conditions to meet its needs, and adjustment when, “There is a composing and harmonizing of the various elements of our being such that, in spite of changes in the special conditions that surround us, these conditions are also arranged, settled, in relation to us” (Dewey 1934, 12-3). While the latter two involve inquiry, according to Dewey, only through adjustment can potential religious experiences arise. The obvious problem here is that the resulting habit would depend entirely on the situation in which the adjustment occurred. Different cultures, as Dewey himself admitted, produce different habits. In this way, it appears as if Dewey’s account of faith is not at all ‘common.’ Like James, Dewey might easily have been left with an axiologically non-natural view of faith as functional in terms of ‘cash value.’ The important difference, though, is that for Dewey,

primary experience occurs in the field of transactions between the “live creature” and environing conditions. It is not merely psychological or subjective but inclusive, encompassing both the subjects who experience and the subject matter (*die Sache*) of experience, both the “how” and the “what” of experience taken together in their mutual organic connections (Jeannot 2001, 2).

On Dewey’s model, then, we can come to recognize experience as not only a ‘machine state’ of the brain, but also an ‘output state’ of the body, as well as the subsequent change produced in the social and physical environments. Unfortunately, in *A Common Faith*, Dewey echoed James by defining faith in simpler terms as, “The authority of an ideal over choice and conduct” (Dewey 1934, 15). As J.L. Kvanvig has recognized, “The functional faith that involves robust metaphysical commitments is simply not the same functional faith as that of a person without those commitments. In a word, the hearts of those having such faith are set on different things” (Kvanvig 2016, 23). In order to find something more robust in Dewey’s account of faith we will have to turn to the value he found in it in his political philosophy.

Santayana’s clearest attempt to naturalize faith can be found in his 1923 volume, *Scepticism and Animal Faith*, which he intended as a systematic defense of common sense rather than a ‘system of the universe.’ For his view of common sense, he coined the phrase, ‘animal faith.’ Far from merely endorsing those ideas which seemed to him intuitively right (this, in part,
represents the titular ‘skeptical’ aspect of his work), Santayana searched for the primary epistemological features of action. With the richest of ironies, Santayana adopts the Cartesian program only to eventually demonstrate that the radical doubt of skepticism becomes its own petard; its logical conclusion is ‘the solipsism of the present moment,’ i.e. the misguided notion that only the immediately experienced can be said to provide knowledge. But, unlike Descartes, Santayana did not conclude that knowledge must consist in innate ideas. Rather, he claims that knowledge is simply the concomitance of impulses one exhibits in any mundane action, mediated by symbols (Santayana 1923, 164). For instance, when walking across the street we exhibit an a-rational, animal faith in a host of factors – that the street really exists, that our perceptions can be trusted in reference to traffic patterns, and so on. When these default beliefs are brought into discourse through symbols, Santayana claimed, we can be said to know. The best example of Santayana’s animal faith as knowledge can be found in the chapter of Scepticism entitled “Knowledge is faith mediated by symbols.” There, Santayana wrote,

When the proverbial child cries for the moon, is the object of his desire doubtful? He points at it unmistakably; yet the psychologist (not to speak of the child himself) would have some difficulty in recovering exactly the sensations and images, the gathering demands and fumbling efforts, that traverse the child’s mind while he points… His elders may say that he doesn’t know what he wants, which is probably true of them also: that is, he has only a ridiculously false and inconstant idea of what the moon may be in itself. But his attention is arrested in a particular direction, his appetition flows the same way; and if he may be said to know anything, he knows that there is something there that he would like to reach, which he would like to know better. He is a little philosopher; and his knowledge, if less diversified and congealed, is exactly like science (Santayana 1923, 172-3).

This illustrates that Santayana, like Dewey, held a dynamic view of experience that required combination with ‘appetition,’ or purpose, in order to comprise the fullness of reason. As he put it, “There is no dilemma in the choice between animal faith and reason, because reason is only a form of animal faith, and utterly unintelligible dialectically, although full of a pleasant alacrity and confidence, like the chirping of birds” (Santayana 1923, 283). He maintained that only through such a natural, inquisitive process is knowledge ever attained.

In summary, for Santayana, reason is just one impulse among many, functioning toward equilibrium and harmony among all the others. The rational impulse orders the world from the outset of inquiry and need not culminate in the attainment of actual ends, even though impulses
are goal-oriented. As he put it elsewhere, “Values spring from the immediate and inexplicable reaction of vital impulse, and from the irrational part of our nature. The rational part is by its essence relative; it leads us from data to conclusions, or from parts to wholes; it never furnishes the data with which it works” (Santayana 1896, 15). For Dewey, impulses are similarly instrumental (goal-oriented), but receive meaning from social interactions with others. Habits, for Dewey, are the result of such social interactions and can only be changed once ends are actually attained. 8 In other words, where Santayana saw the relationship between impulses, habits, and reason as the conditions for a richer interior world, which incorporated both faith and reason, Dewey saw it as the conditions for the development of social intelligence and democratic progress.

Part 4 – The Value of Naturalized Faith for Dewey and Santayana

Dewey’s main aims in naturalizing faith were religious freedom and democratic equity among faiths. As Michael Eldridge has stated,

Dewey believed that we could improve both our common life and each person's well-being by embracing democracy, not as a mere set of procedures… but as a way of life [that] he referred to as… “democracy as a social idea.” …He was even willing to speak of his commitment to the life of shared experience as a faith. Indeed, he thought that the methods of democracy required such an attitude (Eldridge 1996, 11).

What Dewey had tried, but mostly failed, to convey in A Common Faith was what we call religious experience is, “a quality of our transactions with one another and our environments and not a relationship with some transcendental object” (Eldridge 1996, 11).

8 Dewey’s view of habit was influenced by a number of ancient Greek themes in Peirce’s theory of inquiry and became something of an ontological concept in his philosophy. One was what Peirce called synechism, the idea that the cosmos consists in a continuous whole—with none of its part being fully separable, determined or determinate—increasingly growing together in complexity and connectedness. He argued that this was an essential heuristic hypothesis to all scientific progress. Another theme was tychism, which Peirce believed directly followed from synechism and held that chance was a fundamental aspect of reality. As he saw it, “our knowledge is never absolute but always swims, as it were, in a continuum of uncertainty and of indeterminacy. Now the doctrine of continuity is that all things so swim in continua” (Peirce, 1931-5, 1.171). For Peirce, the combination of continuity and chance led directly to fallibilism, insofar as precision is impossible when measuring the values of continuous quantities. Thus, the laws of nature are probabilistic rather than absolute. As Peirce would put it, the laws of nature express the tendencies or habits of things. From this, Peirce proposed an evolutionary cosmology. The upshot of which was: from irregularity, regularity emerges.
Dewey believed any political inquiry begun in earnest ought to start from “the objective fact that human actions have consequences upon others, that some of these consequences are perceived, and that their perception leads to subsequent effort to control action so as to secure some consequences and avoid others” (Dewey 1927, 243). On his view, a public is created, or emerges, from the consequences of associated living – an idea that still finds relevance in the work of thinkers like Jürgen Habermas (1996) and Ulrich Beck (2006). And, while it is true Dewey’s view still presupposed the Enlightenment-era notion of social progress, it did so with a twist. Because he saw growth as both a means and an end, he rejected the idea of a final, utopian political telos that had been espoused by Modern thinkers like Hegel and criticized by post-Moderns like Adorno. Progress was not a necessary feature of the world for Dewey, but rather was a contingency requiring careful and constant vigilance to ensure. As problematic situations continually arise, innovative solutions are continuously required. He described values as operative, not categorical or teleological; but, such a description does not suggest that values are merely expedient for an individual. Instead, Dewey saw value as hypothetical and tentative and always open to revision toward broader application. His instrumentalism was always tempered by his fallibilism. In this way, social progress, and ipso facto growth, was a non-linear social process for Dewey.10

He understood that democratic constitutions require citizens to have rich repertoires of cultural experience, critical apparatuses finely tuned to subtle political nuances, and the intellectual maturity to not be threatened by alternative points of view—while at the same time requiring a process sufficiently streamlined to address public needs with efficiency and timeliness.11 Though he believed the habits of tradition could be subverted and improved upon through critical thinking, he argued that such a capacity could only be honed by shared

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9 Beck writes, “Although Dewey was certainly not thinking of global warming, [mad cow disease] or terrorist attacks, his idea is perfectly applicable to world risk society. A global public discourse does not grow out of a consensus on decisions, but out of dissent over the consequences of decisions” (Beck 2006, 339).

10 In linear frameworks, causal arrows (and progress) point in a singular direction. By contrast, what I will be calling “non-linear” processes increase complexity through a chorus of interrelated events and feedback loops. Its structure comes not from some teleological design prior to action, but rather emerges through action. As such, causal arrows (and progress) simultaneously point in multiple directions in such a non-linear process, toward what Dewey called ends-in-view.

11 Dewey would couch the problem in this way: social intelligence is a property of publics, not individuals; yet, democratic institutions are aimed solely at the education of individuals and not publics. This mismatch is why democracies often fail and why Dewey spent so much of his time championing ‘creative democracy’ as a ‘way of life,’ instead of merely a mode of governance.
experience, and the best way to ensure this was to reconstruct education around inquiry. Simply put, Dewey believed that if the education of a populace could be reconstructed in such a way that its people could harness their impulses to become the master rather than servant of their habits, then it would be possible to have true democracy, or what he called “democracy as a way of life,” a way of life where our faith in some prime mover, be it intelligent or not, is replaced with a faith in each other.

...democracy as a way of life is controlled by personal faith in personal day-by-day working together with others. Democracy is the belief that even when needs and ends or consequences are different for each individual, the habit of amicable cooperation... is itself a priceless addition to life... A genuinely democratic faith in peace is faith in the possibility of conducting disputes, controversies and conflicts as cooperative undertakings in which both parties learn by giving the other a chance to express itself, instead of having one party conquer by forceful suppression of the other... to acquire the habit of treating it as a way of personal life is to realize that democracy is a moral ideal and so far as it becomes a fact is a moral fact. It is to realize that democracy is a reality only as it is indeed a commonplace of living.

Although the faith Dewey expressed here was not conventionally religious, it is the value that ties his naturalistic ontology to his unshakable hope for our political future.

Santayana, on the other hand, mostly eschewed ‘arm-chair’ political philosophy, preferring to think of himself as ‘a poet in slippers.’ The value of faith for him was aesthetic and moral (by which he meant existential) insofar as, “he believed that it was the source of stunning intellectual, moral, and artistic achievements that had to be understood and whose import must not be lost” (Lachs 2006, 79). In fact, the disagreement he had with Dewey regarding foregrounds and backgrounds in nature was largely a manifestation of such a belief: “By a foreground Santayana mean[t]... the realm of personal consciousness and experiential immediacy, that private and personal vantage point from which each person first encounters and explores the cosmos in which he lives” (Comstock 1965, 120). Whereas, the reality confronted by animal faith, for Santayana, is the background. In the same sentence in which he called that background mysterious and non-human, he complains that, “God and matter are not any or all the definitions which philosophers give them” (Santayana 1925, 688).

However, Santayana was far from dropping his naturalist mantle. He wrote, “Mine is the hard, non-humanistic naturalism of the Ionian philosophers, of Democritus, Lucretius, and
Spinoza” (Santayana 1955, 408). His goal was to disabuse philosophers of their pretensions and show that any human interaction with the background will occur through the symbols of knowledge (as in the above example of the child pointing at the moon.) In a sense, all knowledge for Santayana is interpretation. Yet, this should leave us with neither the impression of Nietzsche’s ‘mobile army of metaphors,’ nor Rortyan language games, because such interpretation stems from the natural impulses of animal faith. To act, then, is to faithfully work with symbols distilled from the background of mysterious nature, and Santayana was wholly comfortable couching his moral ‘ideal ends’ in such religious language: “My philosophy neither is nor wishes to be scientific; not even in the sense in which in temper and method, the Summa of St. Thomas might be called scientific. My philosophy is like that of the ancients, a discipline of the mind and heart, a lay religion” (Santayana 1940, 272).

In his ‘lay religion’ Santayana redefined two important concepts – viz. Piety and Spirituality. Piety, by his definition, is the loyalty to material conditions in which one finds oneself immersed, including one’s own animal impulses and appetitions.12 As he explained it, my atheism, like that of Spinoza, is true piety towards the universe and denies only gods fashioned by men in their own image, to be servants of their human interests; and that even in this denial I am no rude iconoclast, but full of imaginative sympathy with the impulses of idolaters (Santayana 1921, 702). Spirituality, as he defined it, was the higher side of religion which “looks to the end toward which we move… [and is] what would fulfil our being and make it worth having” (Santayana 1905, 264). Where Piety, for Santayana, is the side of his lay religion which takes heed of one’s origins and circumstance, Spirituality is the side which projects into the future, toward what one hopes to become. Santayana’s advice is for us to combine and harmonize these two impulses, this is what it means to live a ‘life of reason,’ in the sense of having a reason to live, both deeply and fully. The outcome of such a thoughtful and meaningful life is what Santayana called ‘detachment.’ In his words, “Detachment leaves you content to be where you are, and what you are… Yet in your physical particularity detachment makes you ideally impartial; and in enlightening your mind it is likely to render your action also more successful and generous” (Santayana 1940, 571).

12 Had he been born in Germany, he may have called this ‘thrownness.’
Part 5 – Implications for Contemporary Discussion

There is recent psychological research to support the impulse-habit-reason picture as both Santayana and Dewey drew it (cf. Gardner 2015). A litany of psychological disorders have been linked to deficiencies in controlling impulses – e.g. attention deficit and hyperactivity disorders, eating disorders like bulimia, and various substance addictions (cf. Dell’Osso et al., 2006). Violent crime like mass shootings and other antisocial behaviors have likewise been associated with impulse control disorders (cf. Srinivasa Murthy, 2007). As we face and increase in these and other social ills, including political factionalism, religious persecution, and xenophobia, it is clear the old lines drawn in the philosophical sand will no longer serve us. The insights Dewey and Santayana provide could offer inroads for philosophers of all creeds to speak openly about these issues, and to no longer speak past one another. This is especially important given evidence suggesting many impulse control disorders are treatable through psycho-social, rather than pharmacological therapies (cf. Grant et al., 2010).

The need is even more apparent when considering how non-philosophers (e.g. Harris 2005, Dawkins 2006, Hitchens 2006) have entered the fray by confusedly rehashing old arguments, subsequently carrying the conversation in an increasingly adversarial direction. However, perhaps something can be done here to jog the points of conversation back together. Some contemporary commentators have already begun to pivot in such a way. The naturalist John Lachs, for example, has recently written,

Philosophers who associate naturalism with the universe as described by science tend to forget about the more primitive, pervasive, and inclusive version of the view. Naturalism is not the position that there is a single world populated by entities that are the proper objects of science, but the unuttered conviction that the world is one and all its parts have access to all the others (Lachs 2009, 66).

Compare Lachs’ concept of ‘primitive naturalism’ to the description of ‘broad naturalism’ as described by Stewart Goetz and Charles Taliaferro (2008), and those lines in the philosophical sand begin to fade ever so slightly. Others, like Thomas Alexander, have abandoned the term naturalism altogether because of its reductionist overtones. (cf. Alexander 2013). Unfortunately, such efforts, while perhaps helpful heuristically, have largely stuck to minor academic points or philosophical generalities without offering much in the way of specifics for general audiences.
I believe the insights we could draw from Dewey regarding the socio-psychological necessity of faith might be a starting point for a deeper, more inclusive discussion to develop. Both theistic philosophers of religion (e.g. Rowe 1979; Hick 1985) and atheistic naturalist philosophers (e.g. Dennett 2006) have sought ways to institute greater religious pluralism. One way to bridge the gap might be to frame such discussions in Dewey’s terms of the human need to manifest some form of faith in an ideal larger than oneself, political or otherwise. Even the world’s most notorious atheist, Richard Dawkins, might be brought to that table, given the points he (unwittingly) makes about epistemic chauvinism (cf. Alston 1986) in his 2006 manuscript, *The God Delusion*. Although Dawkins’ aim in this work is a sort of atheist apology, I believe a philosophical point about promoting religious tolerance can be found in his final chapter, which is entitled, “A Much Needed Gap?” There, Dawkins evaluates the common claim made by both religious and non-religious alike, that religion is vital to human life because it fills a void which no other institution can fill. This argument, as he states, usually takes on one or more of the following four modes.

1. Explanation – Religion has the capacity to explain, accurately, the objective universe.
2. Exhortation – Religion is uniquely equipped to exhort its adherents to act morally.
3. Consolation – Religion offers a consolation not found in other institutions.
4. Inspiration – Religion provides inspiration above and beyond any secular endeavor.

The first two of these claims, ha argues, seem easy to overcome in light of the success of science in modeling the universe and in the slew of evidence of secular peoples acting ethically. However, the latter two are less obviously refuted, even by philosophers. This is how Dawkins accidentally succeeds where Dewey may have faltered. On his view, the claim that life would be empty or meaningless or intolerable without the idea of God is an infantile statement. The logic, as he puts it, fails at the first fence – after all, life may very well be intolerable.

However, Dawkins doesn’t believe life to be intolerable and he suggests if one gives science the chance, it can offer great consolation. He argues that it is only from beneath the great ‘security blanket of ignorance’ that the secular point of view appears so frightening. He sees the belief that religion is the best, or only, means of consolation as a hindrance to human progress. When it comes to the inspiration of science, Dawkins points to authors such as E.O. Wilson, Carl Sagan, Michael Shermer, and Paul Kurtz as a few who have written about the wonder and awe.
and sense of togetherness that we can glean from scientific insights. He quotes Shermer’s *The Soul of Science*,

> What can be more soul shaking than peering through a 100-inch telescope at a distant galaxy, holding a 100-million year old fossil or a 500-thousand year old stone tool in ones hand, standing before the great chasm of space and time that is the Grand Canyon, or listening to a scientist who has gazed upon the face of the universe’s creation and did not blink? That is sacred science. (Dawkins 2006, 345).

As an evolutionary biologist, Dawkins puts the point as follows,

> In *Unweaving the Rainbow* I tried to convey how lucky we are to be alive, given the vast majority of people who could potentially be thrown up by the combinatorial lottery of DNA will in fact never be born…However brief our time in the sun, if we waste a second of it, or complain that it is dull or barren or (like a child) boring, couldn’t this be seen as a callous insult to those unborn trillions who will never even be offered life in the first place? (Dawkins 2006, 361)

I believe that the philosophical point that can be gleaned from Dawkins is something similar to a warning made by William Alston about “judging alien forms of life by whether they conform to the home situation” (Alston 1986, 663). Such caveats regarding *epistemic chauvinism* ought to apply in both directions. If one has *prima facie* justification for belief in God based on the presence of a religious experience and the absence of overriding consideration, then it seems the same must be true about the positive experiences of scientific-minded atheists. If it is the case that human beings can find consolation and inspiration from a source other than religion, then it is not the case that religion is necessary, but instead simply one justifiable way of achieving those ends. If we philosophers can help ease the tension between science and religion… between believers of *every* stripe… religious and non-religious alike, I believe that is the point we must hope to get across.
Works Cited and Bibliography


