1.
PUBLISHABLE ARTICLE

The Significance of Religious Experience

The Promise of John Dewey's *A Common Faith* (1934) in Light of his Theory of Experience

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I hereby declare and assure that I, Simon Jacobs, have drafted this thesis independently, that no other sources and/or means than those mentioned have been used and that the passages of which the text content or meaning originates in other works – including electronic media – have been identified and the sources clearly stated.

Nijmegen; July 2020

References and citations

All references to Dewey's work will be made from *The Collected Works of John Dewey* 1882-1953, edited by Jo Ann Boydston (Southern Illinois University Press, 1969-1991), published as *The Early Works: 1882-1898* (EW), *The Middle Works: 1899-1924* (MW), and *The Later Works: 1925-1953* (LW). References will include the book title or abbreviation, followed by the volume and page number in the collected works. For example, *CF* [LW 9:13] refers to *A Common Faith* (1934); *The Later Works*, volume 9, page 13.

Book abbreviations:
AE: *Art as Experience* (1934)
CF: *A Common Faith* (1934)
EN: *Experience and Nature* (1925)
QC: *The Quest for Certainty* (1929)

Unless indicated otherwise, all emphases in citations are kept from the original.

Abstract

An important premise of John Dewey's *A Common Faith* (1934) is that all prizeworthy aspects of traditional religion can be had equally well in the course of ordinary experience. From this premise, Dewey develops his own notion of religious faith, grounded not in supernaturalism but in our relations to the natural world and each other as human beings. Recently, however, a number of scholars have argued that Dewey's religious faith cannot account for our most meaningful religious experiences, particularly in terms of their *structure* and *intensity*. In this paper, I consider this strand of criticism in light of Dewey's two main works on experience: his 1925 *Experience and Nature* and his 1934 *Art as Experience*. I will argue that, if we are willing to substitute as a criterion of value the *intensity* of a religious experience for its *significance* in effecting a better adjustment in life, Dewey's theory of religious faith provides a coherent and promising alternative to traditional theism.

Keywords: John Dewey, Religious Experience, Experience, Aesthetics, Humanism

I. The Warm Fur Coat of Religious Faith

> The organism, its decay, the indestructibility of matter, the law of the conservation of energy, development, were the words that had replaced his former faith. These words and the concepts connected with them were very well suited to intellectual purposes, but they gave nothing for life, and Levin suddenly felt himself in the position of a person who has traded his warm fur coat for muslin clothing and, caught in the cold for the first time, is convinced beyond question, not by reasoning but with his whole being, that he is as good as naked and must inevitably die a painful death.
>
> Leo Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*

If secular humanism is to be understood as a genuine alternative to religious faith, as a fully rewarding way for human beings to live, the humanist perspective requires positive elaboration. In his 2014 *Secular Humanism: Life After Faith,* Philip Kitcher aims to address the complaint implicit in the lamentation of Tolstoy's Levin, that atheism and secularism allow only for an impoverished and barren form of existence. We find a similar sentiment in Michael Slater's 2014 *Pragmatism and the Philosophy of Religion.* Despite possible intellectual objections against theism, Slater argues, we should understand that religious faith, for many people, functions in providing an overarching framework of meaning and value in life. Even a committed, radical atheist as Sam Harris recognizes the limits of rational argument in this respect: "How many Christians, having once felt their hearts grow as wide as the world, will decide to ditch Christianity and proclaim their atheism? Not many, I suspect" (Harris, 2014; p. 18).

In discussing the practical function and value of religious faith, Kitcher and Slater find themselves animated by the writings of the same philosopher: John Dewey (1859-1952). In his 1934 *A Common Faith*, Dewey argues against the same two camps

as Kitcher: traditional theists clinging to belief and dogma invalidated by modern science, and militant atheists using this science to argue for the wholesale dismissal of religion in every aspect of life. Dewey's central aim in *A Common Faith*, then, is to make a distinction between *religion* as a body of beliefs and practices and *the religious* as a quality of experience, and to argue for the emancipation of religious experience from the monopoly of institutionalized religion. Were the religious phase of experience separated from traditional religion, Dewey argues, the religious function would finally be free to develop on its own account, and people would find that genuinely religious experiences are much less rare and infrequent than they are commonly supposed to be. In a 1933 review of Nelson Wieman, Douglas Clyde Macintosh, and Max Carl Otto's *Is There A God? A Conversation*, Dewey articulates his conviction as follows:

> I have found – and there are many who will corroborate my experience by their own – that all of the things which traditional religions prize and which they connect exclusively with their own conception of God can be had equally well in the ordinary course of human experience in our relations to the natural world and to one another as human beings related in the family, friendship, industry, art, science, and citizenship. *Either then the concept of God can be dropped out as far as genuinely religious experience is concerned or it must be framed wholly in terms of natural and human relationship involved in our straightaway human experience*. ("Dr. Dewey Replies" [LW9: 224]).

For Dewey, all that is prizeworthy in religious faith can be had in the course of ordinary experience, independent of the beliefs and practices of particular religions. Developing this idea in *A Common Faith* leads Dewey to reinterpret religious faith as "the unification of the self through the 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" (*CF* [LW 9:23]), and God as the "*active* relation between ideal

and actual" (*CF* [LW 9:34]). I will explain how Dewey came to these idiosyncratic and somewhat puzzling notions of God and faith below. For now, it suffices to say that not everyone was equally convinced by Dewey's reinterpretation of the religious function. John Herman Randall Jr. reminds us of George Santayana's response to *A Common Faith*: "A Common Faith? A very common faith indeed!" (Randall, 1977; p. 241), and more recently we find in such authors as Shea (1984), Rockefeller (1991), Slater (2014) and Weidenbaum (2019) serious doubt as to whether Dewey's "religious faith" can provide a valid alternative to traditional theism.

The purpose of this paper is to consider one specific strand of criticism levied against *A Common Faith*: that Dewey's notion of religious faith cannot account for our most meaningful religious experiences. According to Weidenbaum (2019), Dewey's theory fails to account for both the *structure* and the *intensity* of religious experience. Considering Arjuna's vision of Krishna's universal form Vishnu in book 11 of the *Bhagavad-Gita*, Weidenbaum argues, "it is difficult to conceive of what is being alluded to in these passages as a mere projection or reification from even the most exuberant or terrifying "rhythmic points in the movement of experience," as Dewey envisaged it" (Weidenbaum, 2019; p. 114). If Weidenbaum is right that Dewey cannot account for our most meaningful religious experiences, Dewey's assertions that all prizeworthy aspects of religion can be had in the course of ordinary experience, and that "the concept of God can be dropped out as far as genuinely religious experience is concerned", become problematic. Moreover, Weidenbaum's suggestion that our most meaningful religious experiences may perhaps only be explained with reference to the transcendent provides a serious challenge to such naturalist projects as Kitcher's secular humanism.

II. Dewey's *Common Faith*

Religion occupies an interesting place in Dewey's corpus. As a young scholar at the University of Michigan, where he obtained his first teaching position, Dewey gave addresses to the University's Students' Christian Association (S.C.A.) with such titles as "The Obligation to Knowledge of God" (1884), "The Place of Religious Emotion" (1886), and "Christianity and Democracy" (1892). Dewey even conducted a Bible class for the S.C.A. on "The Life of Christ – with Special Reference to Its Importance as a Historical Event". As Rockefeller (1991) explains, these addresses and classes show Dewey's struggle to integrate a congregationalist upbringing with the neo-Hegelianism and new psychology that had heavily influenced him as a graduate student at John Hopkins University. After his move to Chicago in 1894, however, Dewey broke with the church, and despite Rockefeller's assertion that Dewey's theory of religious experience was "integral to his thinking at each of the major stages in the evolution of his philosophy" (Rockefeller, 1998; p. 124), religion vanished almost completely from Dewey's philosophical writings until 1928, when Dewey was asked to deliver the Gifford Lectures at the University of Edinburgh. The final lecture of this series, published as *The Quest for Certainty* (1929), provides an outline of the religious faith that Dewey would fully develop in his 1934 *A Common Faith*.

The Quest for Certainty (1929)

The starting point of *The Quest for Certainty* is that "man who lives in a world of hazards is compelled to seek for security" (*QC* [LW 4:3]). Although this quest is biologically and socially understandable, Dewey argues that it has led man to overvalue permanence. Philosophers have even gone so far as to divide reality into two realms: a

fleeting, ever-changing realm of experience, and a superior realm of unchanging Being, understood in terms of such entities as Platonic Forms, God, Truth, or mathematics. Dewey's aim in *The Quest for Certainty*, then, is to argue against philosophy's cognitive quest for absolute certainty, and to propose an alternative goal, modeled after the empirical sciences: security in terms of a high degree of probability, and an active, experimental regulation of ever-changing environmental conditions.

In the final lecture, Dewey likens this shift from absolute certainty to regulation of change to Kant's "Copernican revolution". "The old center was mind knowing by means of an equipment of powers complete within itself, and merely exercised upon an antecedent external material equally complete in itself. The new center is indefinite interactions taking place within a course of nature which is not fixed and complete, but which is capable of direction to new and different results through the mediation of intentional operations. Neither self nor world, neither soul nor nature […] is the center, any more than either earth or sun is the absolute center of a single universal and necessary frame of reference" (*QC* [LW 4:232]). This marks a redirection from an unchanging reality to ordinary experience, from metaphysical speculation to empirical exploration, and from the ideal of knowledge to an ideal of intelligent action.

The consequences of this "Copernican revolution" lead Dewey to discuss the relation between the actual and the ideal; between given conditions and "ends or consequences not now existing but which the actual may through its use bring into existence" (*QC* [LW 4:239]). Classic philosophies, in their quest for absolute cognitive certainty, have often attempted to prove that the ideal is already and eternally a property of the actual. Dewey, however, argues for other ways of idealizing the world:

> There is idealization through purely intellectual and logical processes, in which reasoning alone attempts to prove that the world has characters that satisfy our highest aspirations. There are, again, moments of intense emotional appreciation when, through a happy conjunction of the state of self and of the surrounding world, the beauty and harmony of

existence is disclosed in experiences which are the immediate consummation of all for which we long. Then there is an idealization through actions that are directed by thought, such as are manifested in the works of fine art and in all human relations perfected by loving care. The first path has been taken by many philosophies. The second while it lasts is the most engaging. It sets the measure of our ideas of possibilities that are to be realized by intelligent endeavor. But its objects depend upon fortune and are insecure. The third method represents the way of deliberate quest for security of the values that are enjoyed by grace in our happy moments (*QC* [LW 4:240-241]).

Nature, in providing moments of complete enjoyment, gives birth to objects that stay with us as ideal. This is not a passive process; nature supplies material for ideals in response to active search. This type of idealism does not coincide with philosophies and religions that argue for a fixed union of actual and ideal in ultimate Being. Rather, Dewey imagines a religious attitude "as a sense of the possibilities of existence and as devotion to the cause of these possibilities" (*QC* [LW 4:242]). Such a religion does not have to conflict with science. It can shift away from the defensive and apologetic position of dogmatic theism, and can devote its energy to "positive activity in behalf of the security of underlying possibilities of actual life" (*QC* [LW 4:243]). Dewey is here promoting, in germ, a religious attitude that surrenders all commitment to dogma in favor of an idealism of action, devoted to possibilities that inhere in nature and social life. In this respect, the final chapter of *The Quest for Certainty* serves as an important precursor to the notion of religious faith that Dewey develops in *A Common Faith*.

A Common Faith (1934)

Apart from the final chapter of *The Quest for Certainty*, *A Common Faith* is Dewey's only mature work to explicitly address the topic of religion. The book is based on Dewey's 1933 Yale Dwight Huntington Terry lecture series, and consists of three lectures. In the first lecture, "Religion versus the Religious", Dewey advocates emancipating "the religious" from particular institutionalized religions, and discusses the role of the imagination and natural piety in "the religious". The second lecture, "Faith and Its Object", explicates the object of the religious faith described in the first lecture, and provides Dewey's discussions of moral faith and the term "God". Finally, the third lecture, "The Human Abode of the Religious Function", discusses the social embeddedness of religion, and the promise of a "common faith".

Dewey begins by opposing two camps: traditional religionists and militant atheists. Traditional religionists, according to Dewey, hold that "nothing worthy of being called religious is possible apart from the supernatural" (*CF* [LW 9:3]). Militant atheists agree, but argue that science has completely discredited the supernatural, and that, consequently, all historic religions must be dismissed. Dewey proposes to reject the identification of the religious with the supernatural. The heart of Dewey's point is that there is a difference between "*a* religion" and "the religious"; "between anything that may be denoted by a noun substantive and the quality of experience that is designated by an adjective" (*CF* [LW 9:4]). Whereas "religion" always signifies a body of beliefs and some kind of institutional organization, "religious" implies no such thing. Rather, "it denotes attitudes that may be taken toward every object and every proposed end or ideal" (*CF* [LW 9:8]). "Religious", as a quality of experience or an attitude toward existence, signifies something that may belong to all aesthetic, scientific, and moral experience, as well as to experiences of companionship or friendship.

Religious experience can effect an adjustment in life. It can provide orientation and purpose, and often brings a sense of security and peace. Religionists seize on the existence of religious experience and its effects as proof for the existence of God. Dewey, however, denies that religious experience provides special insight into its cause, or that it is on account of the cause that an experience takes on religious force. The religious quality of an experience is "the *effect* produced, the better adjustment in life and its conditions, not the manner and cause of its production" (*CF* [LW 9:11]). The *function* or *effect* of an experience determines its religious value. If reading poetry leads me to a better adjustment, there is religious force to that experience. Were the religious function "rescued through emancipation from dependence upon specific types of beliefs and practices", Dewey argues, "many individuals would find that experiences having the force of bringing about a better, deeper, and enduring adjustment in life are not so rare and infrequent as they are commonly supposed to be" (*CF* [LW 9:11]).

For Dewey, "adjustment", in contrast to mere "accommodation" or "adaptation", signifies a change in our fundamental orientation to life and existence, a "composing and harmonizing of the various elements of our being" (*CF* [LW 9:12]). An important role in adjustment is played by the imagination. Religious experience includes the world and the self as ideals, as possibilities as much as actualities, and imagination engages the possible. For Alexander (2013a), this is the key to understanding Dewey's account of religion. "The religious is our *imaginative way of being in the world and the world's availability as the possible or ideal*" (Alexander, 2013a; p. 363). "The orientation of the whole self must be to see the possible as *authentically contingent* and that the possibilities of the present are not available except through imagination" (*ibid.* p. 366). Developing this connection between the religious function and adjustment leads Dewey to his idiosyncratic notion of religious faith as "the unification of the self through the 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" (*CF* [LW 9:23]).

Imagination engages the dimension of possibility in existence, and presents us with ideal ends. The question Dewey asks, however, is whether these ideal ends are genuinely ideal, or "ideal only in contrast with our present estate" (*CF* [LW 9:29]). This is an important question because it determines the meaning of the word "God". Do we see God as "the unity of all ideal ends arousing us to desire and actions", or as "some kind of Being having prior and therefore non-ideal existence?" (*CF* [LW 9:29]). Separating religious values from a supernatural conception of God frees us to search for ideals and values and to explore "the actual conditions by means of which they may be promoted" (*CF* [LW 9:31]). Ideals are neither rootless fantasies nor already completely embodied in existence. Rather, the ideal has its roots in natural conditions; "it emerges when the imagination idealizes existence by laying hold of the possibilities offered to thought and action" (*CF* [LW 9:33]).

Although the aims and ideals that move us are generated through the imagination, Dewey asserts that "they are not made out of imaginary stuff. They are made out of the hard stuff of the world of physical and social experience" (*CF* [LW 9:33]). This is an experimental and continuous process, exemplified by the artist, the scientist, and the good citizen. "Interaction between aims and existent conditions improves and tests the ideal", a process which "advances with the life of humanity" (*CF* [LW 9:34]). These considerations may also be applied to our idea of God. This idea of God is connected to both the ideal possibilities unified through imaginative realization and projection, and the natural forces and conditions that promote the growth of the ideal and further its realization. In other words, "God", for Dewey, signifies the working union of ideal ends with actual conditions, operative in thought and action. Were these foundations and bearings of religion grasped, Dewey argues, religion would be found "to have its natural place in every aspect of human experience that is concerned with estimate of possibilities, with emotional stir by possibilities as yet unrealized, and with all action in behalf of their realization" (*CF* [LW 9:39]).

Despite the individualistic language of the first two lectures, Dewey conceives of human beings as fundamentally part of nature. Whereas both supernaturalism and

militant atheism suffer from an "exclusive preoccupation with man in isolation", a religious attitude "needs the sense of a connection of man, in the way of both dependence and support, with the enveloping world that the imagination feels is a universe" (*CF* [LW 9:36]). This is what Dewey calls "natural piety", an understanding of man that "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" (*CF* [LW 9:18]). Additionally, all ideal aspirations are born and bred within a social matrix. The ideal ends to which we attach our faith "assume concrete form in our understanding of our relations to one another and the values contained in these relations" (*CF* [LW 9:57]). What Dewey argues for, then, is an extension of the religious faith presented in *The Quest for Certainty*: devotion to intelligence as a force in social action, aimed at the realization of the ideals that inhere in nature, art, and human association. "Were men and women actuated throughout the length and breadth of human relations with the faith and ardor that have at times marked historic religions, the consequences would be incalculable" (*CF* [LW 9:53]).

Criticism of Dewey's Common Faith

In Dewey's own time, *A Common Faith* stirred up much criticism. "The book gave rise to considerable controversy", Corliss Lamont reflects in a 1961 publication, "not only on account of its unorthodox approach, but also owing to a certain ambiguity in some of Dewey's formulations" (Lamont, 1961; p. 21). Dewey's use of religious language, and the word "God" in particular, seems to have startled many readers. Lamont himself wrote a review of *A Common Faith* titled "John Dewey Capitulates to God", in which he declared that "nothing that John Dewey has ever done or said shows more clearly, in my opinion, both his actual class allegiances, and the necessity for honest and

uncompromising minds to repudiate his leadership" (Lamont, 1934a; p. 23). Dewey's distinction between "religion" and "the religious" was "as if someone renounced all the existing forms of Fascism as evil, but claimed that the adjective *fascist* meant the true, the good, and the beautiful" (Lamont, 1934b; p. 38). Meanwhile, Dewey's use of "God-language" had theists and humanists arguing over whether Dewey may be a believing Christian after all (Wieman, 1934; Aubrey, 1934; Westbrook, 1991). Michael Eldridge uses this controversy to conclude that "Dewey's willingness to use the language of faith and even the word "God" is counterproductive", and that "Deweyans need to concede failure and try a different approach" (Eldridge, 1998; pp. 168-169).

Dewey's *A Common Faith* also received substantial criticism from the side of traditional theism. William Shea dismisses the work completely, as he finds Dewey "incapable of a constructive interpretation of actual religious languages and institutions" (Shea, 1980; p. 32). A similar sentiment is found in Michael Slater's 2014 *Pragmatism and the Philosophy of Religion*, in which Slater seems much more sympathetic to the religious views of William James and Charles Sanders Peirce than to that of Dewey. Dewey's work, Slater argues, "assumes but fails to show that theism and other supernatural religious views are not rationally justified", and "has failed, and in all likelihood will continue to fail, in its aim of convincing traditional religious believers to reject their supernatural religious beliefs, practices and institutions and embrace Dewey's secular and naturalistic "common faith"" (Slater, 2014; p. 110).

One strand of criticism levied against *A Common Faith* is that Dewey's naturalistic theory simply cannot account for some of our most meaningful religious experiences (Shea, 1984; Weidenbaum, 2019). Jonathan Weidenbaum is most explicit in presenting this criticism, which he develops by comparing Dewey's "phenomenology of religious experience" to the "theologies of transcendence" of Rudolf Otto and Emmanuel Levinas (Weidenbaum, 2019). For Weidenbaum, Otto's intuition of the "numinous" – the wholly other within the Absolute – and Levinas' encounter of the divine in the "face of the other" allow for an explanation of religious experience in a way that Dewey's account simply cannot do. From the perspective of

the theologies of Otto and Levinas, Weidenbaum argues, "Dewey's depiction of the religious as heightened and consummatory experience is simply one more attempt to banalize the spiritual by reducing the transcendent to what is immanent" (*Ibid.,* p. 112).

For Weidenbaum, Dewey's phenomenology fails on two counts: it cannot explain the *structure* of our most meaningful religious experiences, nor can it explain their *intensity* (Weidenbaum, 2019; p. 112ff). "The felt direction of our experience of the transcendent does not begin from us", Weidenbaum argues, but "is directly impressed upon us from *outside* of ourselves" (*Ibid.,* p. 113). Dewey cannot accommodate this felt direction, nor can he explain the qualitative immediacy to the impact of the transcendent. Dewey's explanation of how religious experience seems to come from *beyond* – which, on Weidenbaum's reading, Dewey attributes to the unconscious – cannot fulfill the same role as the "numinous" for Otto or the "face of the other" for Levinas. Moreover, with respect to the intensity of religious experience, Weidenbaum argues that the spiritual in the work of Otto and Levinas "possesses a force that seems to overflow the intellectual and emotional capacity of the subject to contain it", which Weidenbaum finds absent in Dewey (*Ibid.,* p. 113). Arjuna's collapse before Krishna's universal form Vishnu in book 11 of the *Bhagavad-Gita*, Weidenbaum argues, is difficult to conceive of "as a mere projection or reification from even the most exuberant or terrifying rhythmic points in the movement of experience, as Dewey envisaged it". "Even [Dewey's] more ecstatic quotations […] are tepid in comparison" (*Ibid.,* p. 114).

Weidenbaum's criticism is a challenge to Dewey's project for two reasons. First, Weidenbaum seems to argue that religious experience, on account of its structure and intensity, is marked off from other types of experience, and simply cannot be accounted for by any naturalistic theory. This would not only be a blow to Dewey's religious faith – that it cannot explain the very thing it claims to emancipate – but also to Dewey's overall theory of experience – that it does not provide the "universal coverage" of experience that it claims to provide. Second, if Dewey's philosophy cannot *explain* religious experience, this category of experience may then be entirely

inaccessible to someone upholding Dewey's philosophy. If our most meaningful religious experiences truly depend on something "beyond" the naturalistic picture, then any attempt to emulate such experience without the import of the beyond may indeed be tepid and banal, and any naturalistic humanism may prove unable to provide the positive elaboration it would need to become a genuine alternative to theism. Naturally, this would not only be detrimental to Dewey's philosophical project, but to a great number of philosophical projects of the twentieth century.

In the remainder of this paper, I will defend Dewey's religious faith against Weidenbaum's criticism. In the next section, I will show that this criticism depends on an inaccurate interpretation of Dewey's notion of (aesthetic) experience. If we read *A Common Faith* in light of Dewey's two main works on experience – *Experience and Nature* (1925) and *Art as Experience* (1934) – we see that Dewey is much better equipped to explain the structure and intensity of religious experience than Weidenbaum assumes. Moreover, these works raise the question whether Weidenbaum's criticism is relevant to Dewey's faith. As I will argue in the final section, *A Common Faith* problematizes "intensity" as a criterion for the value of religious experience. I will conclude that, if we are willing to substitute as a criterion of value the *intensity* of a religious experience for its *significance* in effecting a better adjustment in life, Dewey's religious faith provides a coherent and promising alternative to traditional theologies.

III. Dewey's on *Experience*

Experience and Nature is often considered Dewey's most explicit work on metaphysics and epistemology. The key aim of the work is to argue against the separation of human beings and experience from nature. Dewey starts by distinguishing between two phases of experience: primary and secondary experience. Primary experience is identified as ordinary experience, and it is *of* nature as well as *in* nature. "It is not experience which is experienced", Dewey argues, "but nature – stones, plants, animals, diseases, health, temperature, electricity, and so on" (*EN* [LW 1:12]). In its primary integrity, experience refers both to *what* is experienced and *how* it is experienced. Only through intellectual reflection is primary experience subsequently transformed into subject and object, experience and nature, mind and physical world; the objects of secondary experience. Inspired by the empirical sciences, Dewey argues that all philosophical inquiry should start from experience – "that refined methods and products be traced to their origin in primary experience" – and return to experience for verification – "that they may be usable methods by which one may go to his own experience, and, discerning what is found by use of the method, come to understand better what is already within the common experience of mankind" (*EN* [LW 1:39-40]).

Experience has its roots in the essential conditions of life and, for Dewey, is best understood as the interaction between an organism and its environment. It consists of both active and passive aspects. The experience of a child, for example, involves such "doings" as touching, reaching and pushing, as well as "undergoings" – in terms of suffering or enjoying – of the consequences of these acts. To the extent that we become aware of the relations between doings and undergoings do we become aware of the *meaning* of things. As Dewey explains, "it is not experience when a child merely sticks his finger into a flame; it is experience when the movement is connected with

the pain which he undergoes in consequence. Henceforth the sticking of the finger into the flame *means* a burn" (*Democracy and Education* [MW 9:151]).

Primary experience is concerned with qualities immediately suffered and enjoyed that, for Dewey, belong to the objects of experience in their own right: "*Things* are beautiful and ugly, lovely and hateful, dull and illuminated, attractive and repulsive" (*EN* [LW 1:91]). However, objects are also characterized by their connections to past and future conditions. These connections are not immediately perceived, but apprehended through reflection. As Rockefeller explains, "Things function in experience in a twofold fashion: both as finalities, that is, as sources of immediate enjoyment and suffering, and as instrumentalities to other direct experiences" (Rockefeller, 1991; p. 393). The mark of aesthetic experience is a concern with immediate quality as an end in itself; the mark of scientific inquiry is a concern with the instrumentality of things:

> The office of physical science is to discover those properties and relations of things in virtue of which they are capable of being used as instrumentalities; physical science makes no claim to disclose the inner nature of things but only those connections of things with one another that determine outcomes and hence can be used as means. The *intrinsic* nature of events is revealed in experience as the immediately felt qualities of things. (*EN* [LW 1:6])

All that is valuable in life is found in the realm of immediate quality; everything else is valuable only insofar as it enables other experiences. Values and ideals are potential enjoyments in nature, chosen as desired objectives and guides to action. This is what Dewey means when he asserts that nature is "idealizable": it contains the "means and materials by which the values we judge to have supreme quality may be embodied in existence" (*QC* [LW 4:241]). In *The Quest for Certainty*, this leads Dewey to a religious attitude as "a sense of the possibilities of existence" and "devotion to the cause

of these possibilities" (*QC* [LW 4:242]). In *Experience and Nature*, it leads Dewey to conclude that "art – the mode of activity that is charged with meanings capable of immediately enjoyed possession – is the complete culmination of nature", and science "a handmaiden that conducts natural events to this happy issue" (*EN* [LW 1:269]).

The relation between primary experience, aesthetics, and ideals is also an important theme in Dewey's *Art as Experience* (1934). In this work, Dewey develops the project of restoring "continuity between the refined and intensified forms of experiences that are works of art and the everyday events, doings, and sufferings that are universally recognized to constitute experience" (*AE* [LW 10:9]). Aesthetics should start "by going back to experience of the common or mill run of things to discover the esthetic quality such experience possesses" (*AE* [LW 10:16]); that is, to the qualities of objects and events immediately enjoyed and suffered in ordinary experience. Dewey is sensitive, however, to the fact that much of our ordinary experience is not primarily characterized by its esthetic quality. Experience tends to be inchoate and distracted. What Dewey wants to present as the starting point for his inquiry into aesthetics is not just any experience, but "*an* experience" or a *consummatory* experience:

> In contrast with such experience, we have *an* experience when the material experienced runs its course to fulfillment. Then and then only is it integrated within and demarcated in the general stream of experience from other experiences. A piece of work is finished in a way that is satisfactory; a problem receives its solution; a game is played through; a situation, whether that of eating a meal, playing a game of chess, carrying on a conversation, writing a book, or taking part in a political campaign, is so rounded out that its close is a consummation and not a cessation. Such an experience is a whole and carries with it its own individualizing quality and self-sufficiency. It is *an* experience. (*AE* [LW 10:42])

We recall *an* experience as having its own individualizing quality and self-sufficiency: *this* meal in Paris, *that* storm we went through crossing the Atlantic. Its internal integration and ordered movement provide fulfillment and a satisfying emotional quality. Shea (1980), Anderson (2006) and Weidenbaum (2019) all find in the concept of consummatory experience the key to understanding Dewey's philosophy of religion; Weidenbaum even goes so far as to *equate* "the religious" in Dewey to "heightened and consummatory experience", which is one of the grounds for him to doubt whether Dewey's philosophy can account for the intensity of our most profound religious experiences (Weidenbaum, 2019; p. 112ff). There is certainly an intimate connection between consummatory experiences and experiences with a religious quality but, as I will explain below, there is a significant difference between these experiences also.

Any experience, for Dewey, is characterized by a qualitative background. We may, within an experience, focus on certain object and events, but the experience itself has an indefinite total setting, a horizon, which is best evidenced by our constant sense of things as belonging or not belonging. Although the sense of this qualitative background is immediate, it is not an object of knowledge or reason. "Intuition", Dewey argues, "has been used by philosophers to designate many things – some of which are suspicious characters. But the penetrating quality that runs through all the parts of a work of art and binds them into an individualized whole can only be emotionally "intuited"" (*AE* [LW 10:196]). For Dewey, "any experience becomes mystical in the degree in which the sense, the feeling, of the unlimited envelope becomes intense – as it may do in experience of an object of art" (*AE* [LW 10:197]):

> A work of art elicits and accentuates this quality of being a whole and
> of belonging to the larger, all-inclusive, whole which is the universe in
> which we live. This fact, I think, is the explanation of that feeling of
> exquisite intelligibility and clarity we have in the presence of an object
> that is experienced with esthetic intensity. It explains also the religious
> feeling that accompanies intense esthetic perception. We are, as it were,

introduced into a world beyond this world which is nevertheless the deeper reality of the world in which we live in our ordinary experience. We are carried out beyond ourselves to find ourselves. I can see no psychological ground for such properties of an experience save that, somehow, the work of art operates to deepen and to raise to great clarity that sense of an enveloping undefined whole that accompanies every normal experience. (*AE* [LW 10:199])

Although it is understandable given such passages as the one above that an author like Anderson (2006) refers to Dewey as a "sensible mystic", I am inclined to favour the interpretation of Alexander (1987) that Dewey points to the religious quality of aesthetic experiences, "not because they reveal some supernatural realm, but because such moments mark the fulfillment of the impulsion of the self toward embodied meaning and value" (Alexander, 1987; p. 258). According to Alexander, the "world beyond this world" is "simply the possibility for fulfilled meaning present in *this* world", and it is only because so much of our ordinary experience is fragmented and divided that "such moments are interpreted as revelations of an entirely different metaphysical order" (Alexander, 1987; p. 258). As Dewey himself argues, "intuition is that meeting of the old and new in which the readjustment involved in every form of consciousness is effected suddenly by means of a quick and unexpected harmony", which, "in its bright abruptness is like a flash of revelation; although in fact it is prepared for by long and slow incubation" (*AE* [LW 10:270]).

The similarities in theme and terminology between this passage and *A Common Faith* seem evident, all the more because Dewey continues in the subsequent passage with the role of *imagination*. Imagination is at work when old and familiar things are made new in experience, which is one of the key functions of art. In contrast to habit, in imagination the mind "seeks and welcomes what is new in perception but is enduring in nature's possibilities" (*AE* [LW 10:274]). "Mind", for Dewey, is the system of meanings that we carry into an experience; the "abiding background" that is "formed

out of modifications of the self that have occurred in the process of prior interactions with environment" (*AE* [LW 10:269]). Consciousness is the place where this system of meanings and the environment meet: it is "the continuous readjustment of the self and the world in experience" (*AE* [LW 10:270]). Experience becomes conscious only when old meanings are forced to change on account of new meanings in the environment; without the imaginative phase of experience we could simply rely on habit and routine.

Experience is the interaction between organism and environment. The organism carries into this experience a system of meanings, and conscious experience occurs whenever part of that system is forced to transform on account of new meanings in the environment, in which case imagination is the faculty that accommodates past meanings to new meanings. Although perception is immediate, it is always *mediated* by this system of meanings. As such, the difference between a perception and its interpretation is extrinsic, meaning that judgment on its validity can never be based exclusively on the experience itself:

> The proposition that the perception of a horse is objectively valid and that of a centaur fanciful and mythical does not denote that one is a meaning of natural events and the other is not. It denotes that they are meanings relatable to *different* natural events, and that confused and harmful consequences result from attributing them to the same events. […] The matter of cognitive validity of the horse-perception and the cognitive invalidity of the centaur-perception is not an affair of intrinsic difference in the two perceptions, which inspection of the two states of awareness as such can ever bring to light; it is a causal matter, brought to light as we investigate the causal antecedents and consequents of the events having the meanings. (*EN* [LW 1:243]).

There is, in terms of the perception itself, no intrinsic difference between a horse-perception and a centaur-perception: the cognitive validity of the one and invalidity of the other are only to be understood insofar as the perceptions are investigated in their causal connections to other events. "To discover that a perception of an idea is cognitively invalid is to find that the consequences which follow from acting upon it entangle and confuse the other consequences which follow from the causes of the perception, instead of integrating or coördinating harmoniously with them. The special technique of scientific inquiry may be defined as consisting of procedures which make it possible to perceive the eventual agreement or disagreement of the two sets of consequences" (*EN* [LW 1:243]).

The Structure and Intensity of (Religious) Experience

In a 2003 paper, Dacher Keltner and Jonathan Haidt propose that two features form the heart of prototypical experiences of *awe*: *accommodation* – the adjustment of mental structures that cannot assimilate a new experience – and *vastness* – "anything that is experienced as being much larger than the self, or the self's ordinary level of experience" (Keltner and Haidt, 2003; p. 303). For Dewey, any conscious experience involves accommodation: without the need to adjust mental structures we simply rely on habit and routine. However, the combination of accommodation and vastness does seem to get at a central theme in Weidenbaum's conception of religious experience.

Weidenbaum's first criticism of Dewey's account of religious faith is that it cannot explain the structure of religious experience. We feel a religious experience impressed upon us from without, not welling up from within our own unconscious. However, as we have seen, Dewey does not think that experience – whether of the ordinary or of "the transcendent" – begins from us and then moves outward. Any experience involves both the organism and the environment, and perception depends

simultaneously on the system of meanings the organism carries into the experience and the new meanings present in the situation. Hearing my name called out in a busy street will *feel* like a perception impressed upon me from the outside because it is; regardless of whether the perception is caused by someone actually calling out my name or some other combination of environmental conditions. Similarly, a perception of "God" or "the beyond" will feel like it is impressed upon us from the outside because it is, regardless of whether the perception is caused by "God", "the beyond", or some other combination of environmental conditions. The unconscious plays a role only insofar as it provides the system of meanings that *mediates* the perception of the transcendent; the perception does not, for Dewey, *originate* from the unconscious.

This may, to a certain extent, also answer Weidenbaum's criticism that Dewey cannot account for the *intensity* of some religious experiences. As Weidenbaum explains, in intense religious experiences, the spiritual "possesses a force that seems to overflow the intellectual and emotional capacity of the subject to contain it" (Weidenbaum, 2019; p. 113). This seems impossible to explain if the experience originates from within and depends on the subject's unconscious. However, if the experience does not depend on the "unconscious" or the "self" but on the environment within which an experience occurs, the experience has the potential of being larger than the self or the self's ordinary frame of reference. This is what Keltner and Haidt refer to as the *vastness* of the experience. The larger the *situation* – the "slice of environment" needed to interpret the experience as a single whole – and the larger the portion of past meanings called into question, the more intense the experience. The "unification of the self" with respect to "the Universe as a whole" is arguably the most intense experience conceivable in a naturalistic system.

The structure of religious experience is the same as that of any other experience. The experience is a result of the interaction between an organism and its environment; the organism carries into the experience a system of meanings that mediates perception, and the experience becomes conscious when this system of meanings is forced to change in order to accommodate new meanings in the environment. The intensity of

the experience is a product of the number of past meanings forced to change and the size of the environment needed to understand the situation as a coherent whole. The experience is felt to be impressed from the outside because it is, and the experience may feel larger than the subject because it very well may be. When viewed in this light, Dewey seems quite able to provide a framework within which the felt structure and intensity of our religious experiences can be explained. The only question that remains is whether, by explaining their structure and intensity, we have also succeeded in grasping the essence of religious experiences as Dewey himself understood them.

IV. The Significance of Religious Experience

In his 1991 *John Dewey: Religious Faith and Democratic Humanism*, Rockefeller shares an insight into the religious situation in the United States in the 1930s, which sheds interesting light on Dewey's likely aims and interests in composing *A Common Faith* (Rockefeller, 1991; p. 452ff). Confronted by the repudiation of church dogma on account of Darwinism and the decline of optimism and progressivism on account of the First World War and later the Great Depression, a number of approaches to the question of religion appeared on the American scene. One such approach was radical atheism, often grounded in Marxism, and exemplified in the United States by Joseph Wood Krutch. In many ways, Dewey's *A Common Faith* is a response to the situation in the States in the 1930s and the radical atheism of such figures as Krutch.

In a 1935 letter to Max Otto, Dewey explains that his book "was written for people who feel inarticulately that they have the essence of the religious with them and yet are repelled by the religions and are confused – primarily for them" ("Dewey to Otto, 14 January 1935" [LW 9:455]). For Eldridge (1998), this suggests a reaching out to people who did not believe in supernaturalism but missed having religion in their lives. Alexander interprets it as proof that Dewey was primarily addressing militant atheists "who are not aware of what they are missing" (Alexander, 2013a; p. 354). Despite Slater's (2014) criticism, however, Dewey explicitly asserts that *A Common Faith* "was not addressed to those who are content with traditions in which 'metaphysical' is substantially identical with 'supernatural'" ("Experience, Knowledge and Value: A Rejoinder" [LW 14:80]). Dewey's aim, in other words, is not to convince theists to abandon their beliefs or interpret their religious experiences in naturalistic terms. All that is prizeworthy in traditional theism, however, including religious experience, is also available to those who have abandoned supernaturalism.

In the previous section, I have defended Dewey's philosophy against the first implication of Weidenbaum's criticism: that Dewey's theory of experience cannot explain some religious experiences. When we read *A Common Faith* against the background of Dewey's overall theory of experience, we are well-equipped to explain the structure and intensity of religious experience. A second implication of Weidenbaum's criticism, I argued, is that if Dewey cannot explain religious experience, this category of experience may therefore be inaccessible to someone upholding his philosophy. Naturally, having solved for the first implication, this second implication should also disappear, but it may be interesting to dwell on it a bit longer. As I have argued, a key premise of Dewey's religious faith is that all prizeworthy aspects of traditional theism can be had equally well in the course of ordinary experience. However, reasoning from the structure and intensity of religious experience alone, we may be hard-pressed to explain why this experience is worth preserving. Why not do away with religious experience altogether?

Weidenbaum's primary concern in discussing the limitations of Dewey's religious faith is with mystical experiences; "our encounter with that which stretches ahead of our comprehension and exceeds our emotional bearing" (Weidenbaum, 2019; p. 111). The reason we value such experiences, Dewey would argue, is not because of their structure and intensity, or because of their consummatory value, but because of their *significance*; their force in bringing about a "better, deeper and enduring adjustment in life" (*CF* [LW 9:11]). In contrast to mere consummatory experiences, religious experiences are characterized by their effecting an inclusive and deep-seated change in ourselves in relation to the world. Naturally, the intensity and significance of an experience are likely to be correlated, but the reason we would want to preserve religious experiences even when rejecting the beliefs and dogmas of institutional religion is because of their significance, not their intensity. Now, if we agree that the value of a religious experience lies in its significance in effecting a better adjustment in life and orienting us toward the ideal, Dewey's religious faith may actually have a distinct advantage over traditional theologies.

In *The Quest for Certainty,* Dewey distinguished between three ways of idealizing the world: through purely intellectual processes; through "a happy conjunction of self and the surrounding world", and "through actions that are directed by thought" (*QC* [LW 4:241]). Mystical experiences belong to the second category. These experiences are highly intense – and therefore likely to be highly engaging, as Dewey acknowledges – but they depend on chance. Many people may never have such experiences. If we make mystical experience central to religious faith, we leave the discovery of the ideal up to fortune. Against this background, Dewey's religious project may be understood as promoting an alternative, active manner of idealizing the world. As Dewey explains, "what I have tried to show is that the ideal itself has its roots in natural conditions; it emerges when the imagination idealizes existence by laying hold of the possibilities offered to thought and action" (*CF* [LW 9:33]).

Nature, art, and human association all provide insight into the values and ideals latent in reality, that we may obtain and secure by way of deliberate quest. To the extent that traditional religions depend upon the supernatural to reveal these values and ideals and their manner of apprehension to us, they may actually stand in the way of their realization: "Belief in the supernatural as a necessary power for apprehension of the ideal and for practical attachment to it has for its counterpart a pessimistic belief in the corruption and impotency of natural means" (*CF* [LW 9:32]). Dewey does not dismiss the second, "happy conjunction"-type of idealization, but his philosophy does not depend on it either. We have a means of idealizing the world ourselves, by orienting ourselves to the ideal possibilities in nature, art and human relations, and by devoting ourselves to their realization. Although Dewey's theory of experience can provide an explanation of mystical experience, this is not the paradigm case of religious experience for Dewey. Alexander (2013a) presents an excerpt from the autobiography of Morris Dees that, in light of the previous discussion, may provide a much better example of Dewey's religious faith:

Before daylight I finished Darrow's story of his life. It changed mine forever. I was reading my own thoughts and feelings. Darrow wrote that as a young boy, "not only could I put myself in the other person's place, but I could not avoid doing so. My sympathies always went out to the weak, the suffering, and the poor. Realizing their sorrows, I tried to relieve them in order that I might be relieved […]" […] Once freed from the restraints of the corporate world and able to follow his conscience, Darrow undertook cases that made legal history in the fight for human dignity and justice for the powerless. I read about those cases all night. […] When my plane landed in Chicago, I was ready to take that step and to speak out for my black friends who were still "disenfranchised." […] I had made up my mind. I would sell the company as soon as possible and specialize in civil rights law. All the things in my life that had brought me to this point, all the pulls and tugs of my conscience, found a singular peace. (Alexander, 2013a; pp. 360-361):

V. Conclusion

As Philip Kitcher remarks in his *Life After Faith*, one charge often brought up against the secular worldview is that it is "unable […] to capture the richness and depth of human experience" (Kitcher, 2014; p. 2). In this paper, I have tried to defend Dewey's common faith against the criticism that it cannot account for our most meaningful religious experiences. As I have shown, when *A Common Faith* is read against the background of *Experience and Nature* and *Art as Experience*, Dewey's theory of experience provides a framework within which both the structure and the intensity of religious experiences can be properly accounted for. Moreover, if we are willing to agree that the value of religious experience lies not in its intensity but in its significance, Dewey's religious faith has a distinct advantage over traditional theism in providing us with an active and intelligent way of idealizing the world, instead of depending on the fortune of divine inspiration. The paradigm example of religious experience is not found in inaccessible mystical experiences, but in inclusive and deep-seated changes in ourselves in relation to the world; not in Arjuna's vision of Krishna, but in Dees' vision of Darrow. Moreover, religious experience is not a separate category of experience, but a quality of experience that may be present in all aesthetic, moral, and ordinary experiences alike. That is the promise of Dewey's common faith.

Much has been written on Dewey's choice to continue using the word "God" in *A Common Faith* (e.g. Westbrook, 1991; Rockefeller, 1991; 1998; Eldridge, 1998; Alexander, 2013b), and I have no intention of re-opening this debate. However, in light of Weidenbaum's criticism and Kitcher's secular humanism, we may wonder to what extent it still makes sense to apply the label "religious" to Dewey's philosophy. In light of Weidenbaum's article and Dewey's rejection of any "transcendent" elements in his notion of religious experience, we may perhaps wonder if Dewey's faith could not have been founded on a rich conception of aesthetic experience instead of on religious

experience. Similarly, given Dewey's rejection of almost all substantial aspects of traditional religion, we may wonder if we should classify *A Common Faith* not as a "religious faith" but as a "humanist faith" (Lamont, 1961), in line with such works as Fulton J. Sheen's *Religion Without God* (1928), Charles Francis Potter's *Humanism: A New Religion* (1930), and Curtis W. Reese's *Humanist Religion* (1931).

Let us first consider the possibility of grounding Dewey's common faith in a rich notion of aesthetic experience instead of in religious experience. As we have seen, for Dewey, aesthetic and religious experience are clearly related. Dewey's ecstatic remarks on art in *Art as Experience* even lead Weidenbaum (2019) to conclude that religious experience simply *means* heightened or consummatory experience. There is an important difference between religious and aesthetic experience, however. As Alexander explains, the religious "is not a context-specific quality, one characterizing "an experience", but is an "adjustment in life and its conditions", a "reorientation"" (Alexander, 2013b; p. 362). Aesthetics is concerned with immediate enjoyings and suffering in experience. Religious experience may be immediately enjoyed or suffered, but it is *significant* insofar as it affects our general orientation. Insofar as aesthetic experience has the capacity to effect an "adjustment of our whole being to the universe as a whole", it is not *exclusively* aesthetic, but it has obtained a religious quality. Despite the continuity between aesthetic and religious experience, their difference in function make it useful to distinguish between them on a conceptual level.

Second, we may consider the possibility of terming Dewey's common faith not a "religious faith", but a "humanist faith", as Lamont (1961) suggests. Dewey strips his notion of religious faith of almost all substantial aspects of traditional religion – most notably all aspects that relate to "the supernatural" – and defines his religious faith in seemingly humanist terms as the "unification of the self through the allegiance to inclusive ideal ends" (*CF* [LW 9:23]). Moreover, we know that Dewey was sympathetic to the humanist project, evidenced for example by his support for the 1933 "A Humanist Manifesto" (Rockefeller, 1991). There is, however, a key difference between Dewey's philosophy and humanism. "It is the part of manliness to insist upon

the capacity of mankind to strive to direct natural and social forces to humane ends", Dewey asserts, "But unqualified absolutistic statements about the omnipotence of such endeavors reflect egotism rather than intelligent courage. […] The essentially unreligious attitude is that which attributes human achievement and purpose to man in isolation from the world of physical nature and his fellows" (*CF* [LW 9:18]). What sets Dewey's faith apart from humanism is its natural piety; "a sense of awe before the whole of nature and a recognition of human finitude – but also of human possibility – within it" (Alexander, 2013a; p. 362). Although Dewey agrees with humanism that ideals and values do not reside in a supernatural realm, he emphasizes that we should acknowledge both the natural world and the continuous human community as their source. The religious attitude does not only include an ideal of the self, but also a sense of reverence and awe at the natural world of which we are a part.

Kitcher presents his secular humanism as an alternative to traditional religion. Dewey does not present an alternative to religion, as he rejects the identification of religion with supernaturalism. For Dewey, "the religious" can be emancipated from theism and made to develop on its own. Religious faith simply *means* an orientation toward the ideal dimension of existence, a unification of the self and a better adjustment in life, despite this meaning having been obfuscated by traditional religion. Dewey does not present an *alternative* to religious faith; he presents religious faith itself, free from supernaturalist dogma. "Were the naturalistic foundations and bearings of religion grasped", religion would be found "to have its natural place in every aspect of human experience that is concerned with estimate of possibilities, with emotional stir by possibilities as yet unrealized, and with all action in behalf of their realization. All that is significant in human experience falls within this frame" (*CF* [LW 9:38-39]). Whether this is ultimately enough to properly deem Dewey's faith a "religious faith" may remain up for debate. However, it is the proper foundation for a faith grounded in the richness of ordinary experience, symbiotic with the empirical sciences, and, "truly *common* […] beyond the demarcations of creed and denomination" (Weidenbaum, 2019; p. 110).

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2.
RESEARCH
PROPOSAL

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3. Title of research proposal
The Intellectual Foundations of Disenchantment

4. Summary
According to the German sociologist Max Weber (1864-1920), we live in a 'disenchanted world'. Science and reason have driven out spirits and magical forces, but have also led us to a condition of spiritual emptiness. In his hugely influential book *A Secular Age* (2007), Charles Taylor (1931-) suggests that the intellectual foundations of this 'disenchantment' lie in the seventeenth century. Descartes' philosophy made it impossible to believe in spirits and magic; Descartes and Newton caused an eclipse of belief in a meaningful cosmic order, and Grotius and Locke caused an eclipse of belief in a divine social order. As a consequence, meaning and value were transferred to the exclusive domain of human subjectivity, and people were left inhabiting a disenchanted world.

The historical reality of the seventeenth century, however, was more complex. We find in the work of Descartes, Newton, Grotius and Locke various reflections on the relation between divine inspiration and human understanding that call the dichotomy 'enchantment/disenchantment' into question. The aim of the proposed research is to analyse a selection of key texts in early modern philosophy, to test Taylor's genealogy and to re-conceptualize 'enchantment' and 'disenchantment' accordingly. This enquiry will not only advance our understanding of a key issue in early modern philosophy, but will also provide clarification of the notions 'enchantment' and 'disenchantment' for contemporary discourse. [220 words]

5. Resubmitted proposal
-

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d) Other relevant positions

2013 – 2017   Project manager and Junior trainer at Mise en Place and Q-Staff Nederland
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Jacobs, S.A. (2020). "Hoe Peter Strawson Corporate Moral Agency Irrelevant Maakt". *Bij Nader Inzien*. https://bijnaderinzien.com/2020/02/25/hoe-peter-strawson-corporate-moral-agency-irrelevant-maakt/

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Publications for Radboud Reflects:
Selection of publications for Radboud Reflects. An overview of all 27 publications is available on request.

Jacobs, S.A. "Against Identity Politics | Lecture by political scientist Francis Fukuyama". *Radboud Reflects,* 10-03-2019. https://www.ru.nl/radboudreflects/terugblik/terugblik-2019/terugblik-2019/19-03-10-against-identity-politics-lecture-by/

Jacobs, S.A. "Intimiteit | Lezing door psycholoog Paul Verhaeghe". *Radboud Reflects,* 28-05-2019. https://www.ru.nl/radboudreflects/terugblik/terugblik-2019/terugblik-2019/19-05-28-intimiteit-lezing-psycholoog-paul/

Jacobs, S.A. "Vriend en vijand | Lezing door schrijver Arnon Grunberg". *Radboud Reflects,* 03-09-2019. https://www.ru.nl/radboudreflects/terugblik/terugblik-2019/terugblik-2019/19-09-03-vriend-vijand-lezing-schrijver-arnon/

Jacobs, S.A. "Making Sense of Thinking | Lecture by philosopher Markus Gabriel". *Radboud Reflects,* 05-09-2019. https://www.ru.nl/radboudreflects/terugblik/terugblik-2019/terugblik-2019/19-09-05-making-sense-thinking-lecture-by/

Jacobs, S.A. "How the World Thinks | Lecture by philosopher Julian Baggini". *Radboud Reflects,* 16-09-2019. https://www.ru.nl/radboudreflects/terugblik/terugblik-2019/terugblik-2019/19-09-16-how-the-world-thinks-lecture-by/

f) Motivation for doing PhD research

With the secularization of the Western world, 'meaning', 'value', and 'fullness' have lost the self-evident status they had in our religious past. The concept of 'disenchantment' is used by sociologists, anthropologists, and philosophers to refer to the crisis of meaning and the spiritual emptiness that they claim characterize our modern condition. While I think that the concept of disenchantment captures a widespread and deeply felt sense of malaise, I also believe that scholars neglect to acknowledge new sources of inspiration and fullness of our age, such as film, music, or sports.

As an historian of philosophy, I am convinced that any proper understanding of a given philosophical concept can benefit from an investigation of its intellectual history. In this research project, I wish to expand our understanding of the intellectual history of the alleged phenomenon of disenchantment and explore the consequences of this expanded understanding for our conceptualization of both enchantment and disenchantment, and for laying the foundations of a 'disenchantment counter-narrative'.

As my resume shows, I have a deep affection for academia and academic research. My varied background offers me a unique perspective on academic work and academic research. I am familiar with a wide variety of conceptual lenses, academic approaches, and research methods. Additionally, the courses I have taken in the Philosophy Research Master, which include history of philosophy, philosophy of science, and philosophy of religion, have provided me with the necessary background knowledge and conceptual tools for the proposed research. [243 words]

8. Period of funding

Standard PhD, 1.0 fte, 01.09.2020 – 31.08.2024

9. Description of the proposed research

see next page

THE INTELLECTUAL FOUNDATIONS OF DISENCHANTMENT

INTRODUCTION

According to the German sociologist Max Weber, we live in a 'disenchanted world'. Science and reason have driven out spirits and gods, and with them any sense of the world as sacred or mystical (Weber, 1905; 1919). In the narrow sense of an eclipse of the belief in spirits and magical forces, disenchantment may be considered an accomplishment. However, if science can comfortably supersede magic as 'instrumental action', Weber thinks that it cannot take up religion's function of addressing metaphysical issues of meaning (Houtman, forthcoming). Rationalization and secularization have left us in a 'condition of disillusionment', a crisis of meaning that, for Weber, characterizes our modern age (Allen, 2004; Green, 2005; Tribe, 2018).

In contemporary discourse, 'disenchantment' has become a conceptually ambiguous term. It is now used to signify a variety of alleged characteristics of the modern condition, from spiritual emptiness, a crisis of meaning, and alienation from the natural environment, to aesthetic and ethical flatness, and an inability for self-transcendence (Saler, 2006; Walsham, 2008; Sherry, 2009; Smith, 2011; Sherlock, 2013; Asprem, 2014; Buck, 2015; Josephson-Storm, 2017; Main, 2017; Suddaby, Ganzin and Minkus, 2017; Watts, 2019). This conceptual ambiguity is due to the fact that scholars tend to derive their notion of disenchantment exclusively from an analysis of the present condition. However, 'disenchantment' is essentially a historical concept: Our being 'disenchanted' implies that we were once 'enchanted' and, similarly, any attempt at re-enchantment (Berman, 1981; Griffin, 1988; Graham, 2007; Landy and Saler, 2009) implies an attempt at salvaging something lost in the transition from our past to our present state.

Arguably the most prolific and influential writer on the history of disenchantment is the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor (1989; 1991; 2006; 2007; 2011). To deal with the history of disenchantment thus inevitably means to engage with Taylor. However, Taylor himself is ambiguous in his use of the term 'disenchantment', taking it sometimes in a narrow sense to refer only to the eclipse of belief in spirits and magical forces, and sometimes in a much wider sense to signify the eclipse of belief in the existence of any sort of 'objective' order beyond the realm of human subjectivity. Only this wider conception of disenchantment can explain and preserve the import of the concept for contemporary discourse. But is Taylor's genealogy historically accurate?

Arguably Taylor's most extensive work on the history of disenchantment is his 2007 *A Secular Age*. It aims to explain a change in the 'conditions for belief' between 1500 and 2000. Why was it virtually impossible in the 1500s for people not to believe in God, and why has in our age "unbelief […] become for many the major default option" (2007; p. 14)? Taylor identifies three features that "made the presence of God seemingly undeniable" in the 1500s (2007; p. 25), and links them to three secularizing moves that took place in the seventeenth century.

The first feature is that "the natural world [people] lived in, […] testified to divine purpose and action" (2007; p. 25). The cosmos was seen as a humanly meaningful hierarchy of being, in which God served as the highest principle, and all events in the natural order (including storms, floods, etc.) testified to divine purpose and action. Taylor suggests that with the scientific revolution, in particular the work of René Descartes (1598-1650) and Isaac Newton (1643-1727), this idea of the cosmos faded. People found themselves in a universe governed by unwavering natural laws that did not necessarily point to God.

The second feature concerns the relation between God and society. According to Taylor, the hierarchical principle used in mediaeval Catholicism to organise society was a manifestation of divine order, so that "God was implicated in the very existence of society" (2007; p. 25). However, in the seventeenth century, this conception of society changed. In Taylor's view, Hugo Grotius (1583-1645) and John Locke (1632-1704) provided the building blocks for an understanding of society, not as a manifestation of divine order, but as a construction made by rational individuals for their mutual benefit and flourishing. Whereas society as "an utterly solid and indispensable reality" (2007; p. 43) points to a divine order, this is no longer the case with a society freely constructed by rational agents.

Finally, whereas in the 1500s, "people lived in an 'enchanted' world" (2007; p. 25), the mechanical philosophy of Descartes and other seventeenth century authors made it virtually impossible to accommodate spirits and magical forces in the material world. Taylor's view seems to be supported by the example of Balthasar Bekker, a Dutch theologian who, in his 1691 book *De Betooverde Wereld* (*The World Enchanted*) used Descartes' philosophy to deny the existence of spirits and demons, and the causal efficacy of the devil (Fix, 1989; Vermeir, 2013). According to Taylor, God plays an important role in the enchanted world as "the dominant spirit" and "the only thing that guarantees that […] good will triumph" (2007; p. 41). In this sense, 'disenchantment' is an important prerequisite for unbelief to become available as a convincing alternative to theism.

The scope and meaning of 'disenchantment'

In the opening pages of his book, Taylor uses 'disenchantment' only in relation to the third secularizing motif: the banishment of spirits, demons, and magical forces from our worldview. However, already at the end of the first chapter, he employs 'disenchantment' to refer to all three themes together (2007; p. 61), and this broader understanding pervades the rest of Taylor's book. For example, when discussing the nineteenth-century 'malaises of the disenchanted world' (2007; pp. 302ff), Taylor presents these as the consequence of the decline of both the 'enchanted world', and of the divine natural and social orders.

This extension of 'disenchantment' to include the alleged exclusion of God from the natural and social order is however problematic. Several scholars have responded critically to specific points of Taylor's interpretation of Descartes, Newton, Grotius and Locke (Wolterstorff, 1996; Fowler, 1998; Van Ruler, 2000; Greenberg, 2007; Gorham, 2011; Joldersma, 2011; Geddert, 2017; Harrison, 2017). Fowler (1998) and Van Ruler (2000) show, for example, that Descartes' ontological dualism serves not only as a foundation for science in a mechanistic universe of matter, but more importantly even as a ground to demonstrate the existence of an immortal soul and a benevolent God. Similarly, Geddert (2017), in turn, asserts that Grotius does not develop his concept of natural law to ignore revelation, but to provide non-Christians with an entry point that will eventually lead them to the divine source of that law. "Hence, Grotius does not aim to disenchant the world […]; rather, he aims to speak to those who are already disenchanted in a fashion that preserves the possibility of re-enchantment" (2017; p. 217).

Applying the term 'disenchantment' to Descartes, Newton, Grotius and Locke is historically problematic. Although these authors might have agreed in denying the causal efficacy of spirits and magical forces, the world they described was not 'disenchanted' in Taylor's broader sense. As historians of science and philosophy have shown, the seventeenth century witnessed a variety of 'new kinds of enchantment', focused less on a world of occult qualities, and more on providence as a divine gift through which humanity may understand creation (Jorink, 2010). Taylor's genealogy and conceptual framework, based on the dichotomy 'enchantment/disenchantment', seem unable to accommodate these 'new enchantments'.

Aim and structure of the research project

The current research project aims to answer three questions: How does Taylor conceptualize the 'disenchantment of the world' in the seventeenth century? Can the term 'disenchantment' capture the early modern reconceptualization of the relations between

divine order and human understanding? Finally, once we have answered these questions, how should we (re-) conceptualize 'disenchantment'?

The first part of the research consists of a critical analysis of Taylor genealogy:

Research question 1: *How does Taylor conceptualize the 'disenchantment of the world' in the seventeenth century, and what role does he attribute to Descartes, Newton, Grotius and Locke?*

Taylor's most explicit treatment of early modern 'disenchantment' is found in the first part of *A Secular Age* (2007). However, to provide a comprehensive exposition of his genealogy and to test the consistency of his analysis and use of concepts, we must also examine his account of the 'malaises of the disenchanted world' (2007; pp. 299-321) and Taylor's other relevant writings such as *Sources of the Self* (1989), *The Malaise of Modernity* (1991), and "Disenchantment-Reenchantment" (2011). A central question concerns the role Descartes, Newton, Grotius and Locke play in Taylor's genealogy. We have already seen that Taylor's claim that these authors contributed to a disenchantment of the world was refuted by historians of philosophy and science.

The question therefore arises whether Taylor is right in locating the intellectual foundations of disenchantment in the seventeenth century. The working hypothesis of this project is that Taylor correctly asserts that an important transformation took place in that century, but that he was mistaken in characterizing it as the decline of a divine natural and social orders. God did in fact not disappear from these orders, but his role in them changed, as did human access to them. Whereas until the 1500s God was seen as an absolute ruler who directly influenced natural and social events, in the early modern period, he became more of a 'legislator' who governed through the laws he himself had established. Human beings, as part of creation, were endowed by God with reason, which allowed them to 'decode' the book of nature, reconstruct the invariable laws governing natural phenomena, and freely and rationally negotiate the best social order.

In the early modern period, this faith in human rationality goes hand in hand with a sense of wonder and marvel vis-à-vis the divine. Natural philosophers stress that we know just enough to understand the beauty and perfection of God's creation and to become aware that God's acts will remain partly inscrutable to our limited intellects. Similarly, political philosophers emphasize that the human capacity to construct a social order is dependent on the divine gift of reason and on inspiration from Revelation.

Research question 2: *Can the conceptual dichotomy 'enchantment/disenchantment' adequately capture the relation between divine inspiration and human understanding in early modern science and philosophy?*

The second part of the research aims to answer this question by analysing a number of key texts in early modern science and philosophy. The *Meditations* (1641) and *Principia Philosophiae* (1644) show the tension between Descartes' ideal of divinely inspired, certain knowledge, and the conjectural character of his mechanical philosophy. In Newton's *Principia* (1687/1713) and *Optics* (1704), one finds an interesting interplay between conclusions drawn from mathematical deductions and experimental verification, on the one hand, and metaphysical and theological speculations, on the other. In the prolegomena to Grotius' *De jure belli ac pacis* (1625), in turn, we may retrace his aim of leading non-Christians to revelation as the source of natural law. And finally, Locke's ideas on the power and limits of human reason as a divine gift feature prominently in the fourth book of his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689), and they inform his views on the relation between church and state, in *A Letter Concerning Toleration* (1689).

The third part of the research investigates the implications of the historical analysis for our own notions of 'enchantment' and 'disenchantment':

> **Research question 3:** *How should we conceptualize 'enchantment' and 'disenchantment', given the problems with Taylor's genealogy and the development of early modern science and philosophy?*

Throughout his work, Taylor seems to be working from the assumption – also found in Weber – that reason and rationalization are inextricably linked to disenchantment. This explains why Taylor looks for the foundations of disenchantment in the seventeenth century, at the start of the Enlightenment. It also explains why, for Taylor, the only escape from the 'malaises of the disenchanted world' is a return to Romantic art and poetry (2007; pp. 302ff). If science and reason lead to disenchantment, the alternative is to (re-)turn to art and emotion. However, Descartes, Newton, Grotius and Locke show that there is no necessary link between rationalization and disenchantment. Taylor seems right to assert that something important happened in the seventeenth century with regard to beliefs in spirits and magical forces. But in this period, we also find 'new enchantments', firmly grounded within rational scientific and philosophical systems.

'Disenchantment' is essentially a historical concept. If we want to preserve the 'broader' notion of disenchantment for the sake of contemporary discourse, we need to take the historical complexity of its origin into account. The final part of the research investigates how we should conceptualize 'enchantment' and 'disenchantment', given the problems with Taylor's genealogy and the developments in early modern science and philosophy. Does the assumed relation between rationalization and disenchantment hold? If not, might there be a possibility for 're-enchantment' of the present age that goes hand in hand with rationality? Is it even right to claim that we live in a 'disenchanted world'?

METHODOLOGY

In "Philosophy and its History" (1984), Taylor describes his historical method as a 'genetic reconstruction'. The aim of such a reconstruction is to "become aware of the way a picture slid from the status of discovery to that of inarticulate assumption" (1984; p. 21). Methodologically positioned somewhere between the familiar methods of 'rational reconstruction' and 'historical reconstruction' (Rorty, 1984), Taylor analyses history from the perspective of its future implications, glossing over the features of historical thought that do not fit his genetic narrative. It is from the perspective of historical reconstruction that Wolterstorff (1996), Jorink (2010), Gorham (2011), Joldersma (2011) and Geddert (2017) criticize the Taylorian genealogy and emphasize the 'new enchantments' found in the works of Descartes, Newton, Grotius and Locke.

In its historical component, this research will compensate for Taylor's neglect by reading specific texts and passages by Descartes, Newton, Grotius and Locke, with the aim of historically reconstructing the views of these authors on the relationship between divine inspiration and human understanding. The systematic component of the research follows directly from the historical analysis, and investigates the consequences of a more 'complete' historical reading for the contemporary use of 'enchantment' and 'disenchantment'. How should we conceptualize these notions given the historical complexities in early modern science and philosophy?

RELEVANCE

Taylor's use of the term 'disenchantment is highly ambiguous, and his genealogy of this term glosses over a variety of 'new kinds of enchantment' in the work of early modern thinkers which, if taken seriously, may prompt a re-conceptualization of the conceptual framework of enchantment and disenchantment. Given the matching ambiguity of 'disenchantment' in contemporary discourse, which is partly influenced by Taylor's genealogy, it seems important and necessary to reduce this ambiguity. Our research strives to shed light on a number of related questions: Is 'disenchantment' a useful concept to describe our present condition? To what extent are various historical moves toward 'disenchantment' accompanied by a related 're-enchantment'? And is the 're-enchantment of the world' as envisioned in popular literature a feasible and/or desirable pursuit?

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10. Number of words
2489 words (excluding references)

11. Summary in keywords
Disenchantment, Charles Taylor, Early modern science, Early modern philosophy

12. Data management
The research will be based on the study of published sources. The research will not generate 'new' data through empirical research. As the research will not generate (reusable) empirical data, no additional data management on part of the applicant is required.

13. Institutional embedding and supervision
The research project will be carried out at the Radboud University, within the *Center for the History of Philosophy and Science* (CHPS), under the supervision of Prof. dr. Carla Rita Palmerino. The CHPS connects the history of philosophy to the history of science, and analyses contemporary issues form a historic perspective. Professor Palmerino's research focuses on the history of early modern science and philosophy, specifically on the metaphysical and epistemological foundations of natural philosophy. Professor Palmerino's expertise relates directly to the historic component of the proposed research.

In addition, during the project, the candidate will cooperate with researchers from the *Center for Contemporary European Philosophy* (CCEP) working on the philosophy of religion. The previous Philosophy of Religion research master seminar focused on Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age* and the topic of 'disenchantment', and was taught by co-promotor dr. Herman Westerink. Dr. Westerink's research focuses on the relationship between religion and spirituality and the modern subject. His expertise on the work of Charles Taylor and disenchantment tie into the overarching theme of the research, and more specifically the systematic component of (re-)conceptualizing enchantment and disenchantment.

14. Work programme
see next page

Period	Research and education	Writing	Products
2020			
Sep. – Dec.	- PhD course on research methodology - (Re-)Read Weber - (Re-)Read Taylor	Chapter 1 – Disenchantment in Weber and Taylor	Chapter 1
2021			
Jan. – Jun.	- Explicate Taylor's genealogy of disenchantment - Read critiques of Taylor's genealogy	Chapter 2 – Taylor's genealogy of disenchantment	Chapter 2
Jul. – Dec.	- Read critiques of Taylor's genealogy		Chapters 1 and 2
2022			
Jan. – Jun.	- PhD course on early-modern philosophy - Read the relevant texts of Descartes and Newton	Chapter 3 – Spirits and magical forces Chapter 4 – Decline of the natural order	Draft of Chapter 3 Draft of Chapter 4
Jul. – Dec.	- Read the relevant texts of Grotius and Locke - Investigate the 'enchantments' in the work of Descartes, Newton, Grotius and Locke	Chapter 4 – Decline of the natural order Chapter 5 – Decline of the social order	Draft of Chapter 4 Draft of Chapter 5
2023			
Jan. – Jun.	- PhD Course on disenchantment - Determine and explicate the incongruities between Taylor's genealogy and the 'new enchantments'	Chapter 5 – Decline of the social order	Chapters 3, 4, 5
Jul. – Dec.	- Synthesize Taylor's genealogy and the 'new enchantments' - Re-conceptualize enchantment and disenchantment accordingly	Chapter 6 – What to make of 'disenchantment'?	Draft of Chapter 6
2024			
Jan. – Apr.	- Finish answering the main research question - Investigate the interpretations of the research for contemporary discourse on disenchantment	Introduction, conclusion	Chapters 1-6
May – Aug.	- Incorporate final feedback - Write introduction and conclusion - Finish writing the dissertation	Final revision	Dissertation

15. Research budget

Personnel costs

Income (4-year appointment, 1fte):	€ 239.102	
Bench fee:	€ 5.000	
		€ 244.102

Material costs

Conference of the European Society for The History of Science (ESHS) – Conference fee, accommodation, and travel expenses	€ 1.500	
Conference of the History of Science Society (HSS) – Conference fee, accommodation, and travel expenses	€ 2.000	
Dutch seminar in Early Modern Philosophy – Accommodation and travel expenses	€ 500	
		€ 4.000

Total research budget   **€ 248.102**

16. Summary for non-specialists (in Dutch *or* English)

Volgens de Duitse socioloog Max Weber leven we in een 'onttoverde wereld'. Doordat de wetenschap alle vormen van magie uit de wereld heeft verbannen, is de moderne mens de wereld als leeg en betekenisloos gaan ervaren. We zijn hierdoor in een 'betekeniscrisis' terecht gekomen. De Canadese filosoof Charles Taylor schreef een ontstaansgeschiedenis van de 'onttoverde wereld'. Hierin geeft hij de schuld van de 'onttovering' aan een aantal denkers in de zeventiende eeuw: René Descartes, Isaac Newton, Hugo de Groot en John Locke. Volgens Taylor introduceren deze denkers een nieuw wereldbeeld, waarin het bestaan van een vooropgezette natuurlijke en sociale orde wordt ontkend, en bovendien geen plaats is voor geesten, demonen, of magische krachten.

Dat Taylor de 'onttovering van de wereld' gelijkstelt met het ontkennen van een vooropgezette natuurlijke en sociale orde is echter problematisch. Eerder lijkt het geval dat de rol van God in deze orde verandert, evenals de menselijke toegang tot deze orde. Zowel in het geval van de natuurlijke orde, als in het geval van de sociale orde, lijkt in de vroegmoderne tijd een spanning te ontstaan tussen de goddelijke voorzienigheid aan de ene kant, en het menselijke intellect en begrip aan de andere kant. De natuurlijke en sociale orde – vanaf de vroegmoderne tijd begrepen in termen van natuurlijke en sociale 'wetten' – wordt op een nieuwe manier een bron van 'betovering'. Belangrijk is dat deze nieuwe vorm van betovering niet in het begrippenkader van Taylor past. Sterker nog, een gevoel van betovering op rationele gronden trekt het hele onderscheid tussen 'betovering' en 'onttovering' in twijfel.

Een belangrijke reden waarom Taylor de grondslagen van de onttovering in de zeventiende eeuw zoekt, is de aanname dat deze onttovering een directe consequentie is van processen van rationalisatie. Wat de voorbeelden uit de vroegmoderne wetenschap en filosofie echter laten zien is dat deze processen ook een bron voor een nieuwe vorm van betovering kunnen zijn. Dit roept een aantal vragen op over de manier waarop 'onttovering' in de hedendaagse literatuur wordt gebruikt. Hoe moeten we deze 'onttovering' karakteriseren? Is deze onttovering wel een noodzakelijk gevolg van rationalisatie? En zo niet, is een 'her-betovering' van de wereld mogelijk op rationele gronden? [358 words]

17. Title and summary for newsletters and website (in Dutch *and* English)

De intellectuele grondslagen van 'onttovering'
Volgens de Canadese filosoof Charles Taylor kan de 'onttovering van de wereld' die de moderniteit kenmerkt worden herleid tot de het werk van Descartes, Newton, De Groot en Locke. Volgens een groot aantal historici doet Taylor deze denkers hiermee echter tekort, en slaagt Taylors 'geschiedenis van de onttovering' er niet in een aantal 'nieuwe vormen van betovering' in het werk van deze denkers te duiden. Het doel van dit onderzoeksproject is dan ook een her-conceptualisatie van 'betovering' en 'onttovering' in het licht van de nieuwe vormen van betovering in het werk van Descartes, Newton, De Groot en Locke. [98 words]

The Intellectual Foundations of Disenchantment
According to Charles Taylor, the 'disenchantment' that characterizes the modern condition can be traced back to developments in the work of Descartes, Newton, Grotius and Locke. However, as a number of historians argue, Taylor's genealogy of disenchantment does not do these thinkers justice, as it fails to account for a number of 'new kinds of enchantment' in Cartesian and post-Cartesian philosophy and science. The goal of this research project is to investigate a re-conceptualization of the notions of enchantment and disenchantment in light of these 'new kinds of enchantment' in the work of Descartes, Newton, Grotius and Locke. [98 words]