

# **John Dewey “on the side of the angels”: A Critique of Kestenbaum’s Phenomenological Reading of *A Common Faith***

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## ***Abstract***

In chapter 8 of *The Grace and the Severity of the Ideal*, Victor Kestenbaum disputes the naturalistic-instrumentalist reading of John Dewey’s *A Common Faith*. Rather than accept the orthodox reading, he challenges mainstream Dewey scholars to read Dewey’s theism from a phenomenological perspective. From this vantage, Kestenbaum contends that Dewey was wagering on transcendence, gambling on an ideal realm of supersensible entities, and hoping that the payoff would be universal acknowledgement of “a widening of the place of transcendence and faith in every area of his philosophy.” In a long-neglected correspondence between John Dewey and Albert Balz, Dewey responds to Balz’s misreading of his logic as a correspondence theory of truth by stating that through the translation of all the ontological into the logical in the context of inquiry, he is “on the side of the angels.” I argue that Dewey is accomplishing much the same thing in *A Common Faith* by naturalistically unifying the real and the ideal under the heading of the religious. In this respect, Dewey’s naturalism and instrumentalism, rather than Kestenbaum’s transcendentalism, is firmly “on the side of the angels.”

In other words, the openness to the unseen and the invisible in “Religion versus Religious” decisively takes Dewey’s idealism in the direction of the transcendently ideal.

– Victor Kestenbaum, *The Grace and Severity of the Ideal: John Dewey and the Transcendent*

Professor Kestenbaum is plainly friendlier to “metaphysics” than Dewey could bring himself to be. Offering a metaphysical account of the transcendental is just what Dewey would not approve of.

– Alan Ryan, Review of *The Grace and Severity of the Ideal: John Dewey and the Transcendent*

In chapter 8 of *The Grace and the Severity of the Ideal*, entitled “Faith and the Unseen,” Victor Kestenbaum disputes the orthodox interpretation of John Dewey’s *A Common Faith*.<sup>1</sup> Instead of defending the standard reading, he challenges us to view the text from a purely phenomenological perspective, that is, apart from the instrumentalism and naturalism widely seen as central to Dewey’s pragmatism. From Kestenbaum’s vantage, Dewey was wagering on transcendence, imagining an ideal realm of supersensible entities and hoping that the payoff would be universal acknowledgement of “a widening of the place of transcendence and faith in every area of his philosophy.”<sup>2</sup>

In this paper, Kestenbaum’s reading of Dewey’s *A Common Faith* is evaluated in three stages. In the first stage, I examine his rationale for setting aside Dewey’s naturalism and instrumentalism in favor of phenomenology and transcendentalism. In the second stage, Kestenbaum’s phenomenological reading of *A Common Faith* is brought into critical dialogue with the standard interpretation of the text. Also, I explore the possibility that implicit within Dewey’s pragmatism and his account of the religious is a phenomenology of experience.<sup>3</sup> In the third and final stage, the following question is answered: Should mainstream Dewey scholars accede to Kestenbaum’s phenomenological interpretation or insist on defending the orthodox view of Dewey’s *A Common Faith*?

Assistance in answering this last question can be found in a long-neglected correspondence between John Dewey and Albert Balz about Dewey’s *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*. In this exchange, Balz’s misreading of his theory of logic as a correspondence theory of truth leads Dewey to respond that by translating all the ontological into the logical in the context of inquiry, he is “on the side of the angels.”<sup>4</sup> I argue that Dewey accomplishes much the same thing in *A Common Faith*, to wit, a conversion of the metaphysical terms of the debate about what constitutes a religious experience into the logical or operational terms of inquiry. He achieves this by naturalistically unifying the real and the ideal under the heading of the religious. Therefore, the mainstream Dewey scholar’s naturalistic and instrumentalist reading of *A Common Faith*, not Kestenbaum’s phenomenological interpretation, is with Dewey, that is, firmly “on the side of the angels.”

### **Kestenbaum's Challenge**

Phenomenology today means many different things to many different people, so that it might be fair to say that there are as many phenomenologies as there are phenomenologists. Yet there are at least three basic commitments central to the accounts of phenomenologists as diverse as Husserl, Scheler, Hartmann, Heidegger, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty. First of all, most phenomenologists use a method of radical reductionism (or *epoche*), which, though it varies to some degree, can be characterized generally as the translation of things into meanings.<sup>5</sup> Second, many phenomenologists endorse some version of a doctrine of intentionality, such that the subject stands forth from the world of objectified existence, transcending scientific meanings and connecting with those meanings immediately had or experienced in the "life-world."<sup>6</sup> Lastly, almost all phenomenologists are concerned with how individual meanings and existences (beings) constitute the meaning and existence (Being) of the universe.<sup>7</sup> It should therefore be no surprise that the three basic commitments of phenomenology—the centrality of meaning, the doctrine of intentionality and the constitution of Being—manifest in Kestenbaum's brand of phenomenology, too.<sup>8</sup>

Kestenbaum claims that his phenomenology, besides reflecting these three basic commitments, is perfectly compatible with Dewey's pragmatism. Most Dewey scholars agree that any attempt to harmonize another philosophical position with Dewey's must contend with two of its primary features: its naturalism and its instrumentalism. Given Dewey's naturalism, life involves the interaction of organism and environment as part of a larger organic system. According to Tom Burke, the "basic picture, generally speaking, is that of a given organism/environment system performing a wide range of operations as a normal matter of course—scanning, probing, ingesting, discharging, adapting to, approaching, avoiding, or otherwise moving about and altering things in routine ways, in order to maintain itself."<sup>9</sup> Whether within a simple biological system or a complex social one, environmental disruptions stimulate efforts by organisms to restore equilibrium, to adapt their (functionally defined) internal and external environments (in a process biologists call "homeostasis") and to subsequently develop or grow in viable and meaningful ways. On Dewey's instrumentalist account, the process of knowing or inquiry serves to reunify a situation once disrupted; for lower life forms, a kind of proto-inquiry ensues, while for higher life forms, critical analysis, experimentation and habit-formation serve to restore equilibrium. According to H. S. Thayer, intelligent inquiry for human beings "is a transformation of immediately experienced qualities and events into objects of knowledge."<sup>10</sup> As objects of knowledge, the *qualia* and *res* of experience are ordered by the inquirer in instrumentally valuable and meaningful ways, thereby reunifying a previously disturbed situation.

Rather than demonstrate the good fit between his brand of phenomenology and the two core tenets of Dewey's pragmatism, Kestenbaum chooses to look elsewhere for sources of compatibility. He declares that "some of the most interesting and important aspects of Dewey's philosophy are those which are at best only

obliquely related to his instrumentalism and naturalism” (GSI, p. 1). At first glance, neglecting the instrumentalism and naturalism in Dewey’s philosophy might be seen as an evasive maneuver worthy of harsh condemnation. Instead of engaging in polemics, though, I wish to give Kestenbaum the benefit of the doubt by understanding his shift in focus as an overture to Dewey scholars. Specifically, he offers them a challenge: to consider Dewey’s ideas from a new vantage-point, namely, from a phenomenological perspective, and thus to cut their analyses from the usual naturalistic-instrumentalist moorings. Only by giving Kestenbaum such a charitable hearing can we move on to an examination of the deeper rationale for his strategy of rejecting the naturalism and instrumentalism in Dewey’s pragmatism.

Instead of following the lead of most Dewey scholars, Kestenbaum examines the “transgressions” that Dewey makes from his instrumentalism and naturalism. In pinpointing these subtle deviations, he gives his reader a rare glimpse at the phenomenological dimension of Dewey’s work. Particularly in the first chapter of *A Common Faith*, Kestenbaum discovers evidence of a Dewey who “makes what George Steiner calls ‘a wager of transcendence’” (GSI, p. 175), that is, a gamble of faith that transcendental objects exist beyond the limits of the sensible world. Here, faith is not understood as an anticipation or prediction of a future existence; nor is it a higher level of confidence made possible by science or scientific inquiry; nor, moreover, is it an envisioned ideal—as, for instance, a goal, objective, or what Dewey calls an “end-in-view”—that, by hypothesis, will actualize itself at some future time. “Faith, like ideality,” Kestenbaum writes, “cannot provide evidence or justification for the meanings it intends” because “religious faith and religious experience intend meanings which cannot be naturalized by the usual processes of naturalistic certification: knowledge, reflection, observation, thought, practical activity” (GSI, p. 184). Rather than rely on evidential methods, faith in the religious aspect of experience grounds itself on an unusual process of trusting in the unseen. It involves an intentional leap away from the mundane experience of our natural environment and towards a revelatory experience of objects that cannot be verified, sensed, or confined to this world. So, the entire first half of the first chapter of *A Common Faith*, which is devoted to distinguishing the adjective ‘religious’ from the noun ‘religion,’ Kestenbaum understands as “a proposal to view from the standpoint of phenomenology some of the ‘core contents’ of religious experience” (GSI, p. 178).

On a more orthodox reading, the first half of the first chapter of *A Common Faith* is a discussion of the relation between the actual and the ideal. “Actuality” for Dewey denotes the putative conditions of an inquirer’s situation and “ideality” signifies either a possible course of action that will improve the terms of a situation or the imaginatively reconfigured result.<sup>11</sup> In drawing “the distinction between ‘religion’ as a noun substantive and ‘religious’ as an adjectival,” then, he intends to demonstrate that while the term “religion” may be limited to “a special body of beliefs and practices having some kind of institutional organization,” the term “religious” cannot; instead, “religious” points to “attitudes that may be taken toward every object and every proposed end or ideal” (LW 9:8) Dewey pro-

poses that, rather than understand religious experience as access or revelation to a "a separate kind of thing" (for instance, a Platonic Form or a divine source of authority), it is better to appreciate it as having "religious force because of what it does in and to the processes of living" (LW 9:11)—in other words, because of its far-reaching consequences or the ways in which it affects the actual conditions of lived experience. Since the word "religious" is so freighted with meanings and associations concerning the divine, supersensible and supernatural qualities of objects (many originating in the writings and rituals of organized religion), Dewey recommends that language users "drop the term 'religious,'" substitute terms such as "adjustment' and 'orientation'" and "ask what are the attitudes that lend deep and enduring support to the processes of living" (LW 9:11). In naturalized terms, faith in the religious quality of experience is an inquirer's capacity to adapt to the environment by changing his or her attitudes; likewise, faith in ideality is merely the imagined outcome of transforming an experienced situation in fruitful ways.<sup>12</sup> Thus, for the Dewey scholar, plenty of evidence can be found in "Religion versus the Religious" to support the claim, contra Kestenbaum, that faith in the religious and ideal qualities of experience should be understood in wholly naturalistic and instrumental terms.<sup>13</sup>

### ***A Deweyan Reply***

Despite mounting evidence to the contrary, there is still some hope that *A Common Faith* can be fruitfully interpreted from a phenomenological perspective. The issue is whether Kestenbaum can deliver on his promise of giving "Dewey's transgressions [from his naturalism and instrumentalism] a sustained and appreciative hearing" (GSI, p. 1). In an effort to do just that, Kestenbaum turns his reader's attention to a single passage:

Conviction in the moral sense signifies being conquered, vanquished, in our active nature by an ideal end; it signifies acknowledgment of its rightful claim over our desires and purposes. Such acknowledgement is practical, not primarily intellectual. It goes beyond the evidence that can be presented to any possible observer. Reflection, often long and arduous, may be involved at arriving at the conviction, but the import of thought is not exhausted in discovery of evidence that can justify intellectual assent. The authority of an ideal over choice and conduct is the authority of an ideal, not of fact, of a truth guaranteed to intellect, not of the status of one who propounds the truth. (LW 9:15)

Kestenbaum focuses on the final sentence, noting that it ("authority of an ideal over choice and conduct is the authority of an ideal") is not a tautology, but is instead a proposal about the "authority of an intentional possibility" (GSI, p. 193). To clarify what he means by an "intentional possibility," Kestenbaum relies on fellow phenomenologist John N. Findlay, who provides an account of intentional possibility as "inward grasp." Findlay's concept of "inward grasp" is understood as sufficiently

similar to Dewey's notion of immediate experience, or the noncognitive having of an experience, to warrant the assertion that Dewey and Findley are "in accord" (GSI, p. 190). Now, Kestenbaum does concede that Dewey's account of immediate experience differs from Findley's concept in at least one respect, particularly in how Dewey tries "to understand what is objectively there for all of us," rather than Findley's attempt to conceive what is subjectively there for the introspective agent (GSI, p. 191). Yet, he dismisses the difference and continues to defend the comparison. Kestenbaum interprets Dewey's declaration that "[s]uch moral faith is not easy" (LW 9:15) as evidence that Dewey would endorse an additional concept of Findley's "privilege of mind," or the authoritativeness of "moral faith and conviction" in the face of disconfirming evidence (GSI, p. 193).

How would Dewey scholars reply to this selective reading and interpretation of *A Common Faith*? One possibility is that they would point to the remainder of the paragraph, in which Dewey warns against treating ideals as "antecedently existing realities" that coerce our "intellectual assent." So, while Dewey argued in the previous passage that the "authority of an ideal . . . is the authority of an ideal, not of fact," what he did not mean was that the authority of such an ideal entirely escapes factual confirmation through inquiry; otherwise he would not have appended the statement, "the import of thought is not exhausted in discovery of evidence that can justify intellectual assent" (LW 9:15). For Dewey, inquiry that involves observation and fact-finding, on the one hand, plays a significant role in garnering assent; ideality, on the other, supplements fact-finding by pointing beyond the given conditions to previously unobserved outcomes (or ends-in-view) of inquiry.<sup>14</sup> Some, whom we might call 'theists,' will lend authority to an ideal purely in virtue of its ideal quality—that is, as a matter of faith and without observation, experiment, or inquiry. In response to nonbelievers, theists might then vindicate their faith by appealing to preexisting entities (angels, devils, heaven, hell, etc.) to which the ideality corresponds, but for which there is no evidence to confirm their existence. As a result, those otherwise unwilling to make the leap of faith, the gamble on the supersensible, will be compelled to assent out of fear, wonder or worry at the "real" consequences of their failure to believe.<sup>15</sup>

Another possibility is that the Dewey scholar will outright reject any comparison between intentional possibility or Findley's "inward grasp" and Dewey's account of primary experience. According to Dewey's empiricist postulate, "what is [exists] is what it is experienced as," or as it has been previously learned through focused inquiry, stored or funded as habit in immediate experience and henceforth apprehended as well as acted upon (MW 3:164). So, only a minority of human activity—particularly the lived experience of mature adults—consists of reflective or cognitive experience. Since "acquired habits often operate without the intervention of an end-in-view or a purpose," Dewey claims that the modes of action tied to primary experience are "typical of much of human activity" (LW 13:222). Given that mature adults have already learned these habits, they no longer have to actively think about the most common and basic activities, such as walk-

ing, reading, maintaining the thread of a conversation and so forth. Similar to the sea tides, experience ebbs and flows from the sandy beaches of primary experience to the tumultuous waves of secondary experience, but spends more cumulative time on the beach than on the crest of a wave. The majority of human experience is therefore habitual, noncognitive, or had in immediate experience, yet mediated by the products (habits, ideas, concepts and meanings) of prior inquiries.<sup>16</sup> Unlike Findlay's notion of "inward grasp," though, nothing about Dewey's account of primary or immediate experience is introspective or directed wholly inward. Instead, outwardly directed inquiry funds immediate experience with habits that guide the organism in future, intelligent interactions with its environment.

Although Kestenbaum's gloss on primary experience misses the mark, it might still be possible to argue that a unique phenomenology of experience underlies Dewey's pragmatism and his view of the religious. In the words of Garrison and Shargel, who undertook a project to compare Husserl and Dewey, my "intention [is not] to rediscover Dewey as a closet phenomenologist," but to demonstrate "how Dewey's writings lend themselves to phenomenological understanding and reinterpretation."<sup>17</sup> In order to accommodate the naturalism and instrumentalism in Dewey's pragmatism, the meaning of the word 'phenomenology' must be expanded beyond the three basic commitments that most phenomenologists hold dear (the centrality of meaning, the doctrine of intentionality and the constitution of Being). Phenomenology broadly conceived, according to the pragmatist Charles S. Peirce, is committed to "seeing what stares one in the face, just as it presents itself, unreplaced by any interpretation, unsophisticated by any allowance for this or that supposed modifying circumstance."<sup>18</sup> In other words, for a pragmatist, phenomenology is just a matter of perceiving the bare phenomenon. Relying on the text of *A Common Faith* and commentary by several Dewey scholars, I claim that if pragmatism is compatible with the phenomenological perspective, then Dewey's phenomenology of experience has at least four features: imaginative adjustment of the self to the universe, the three-phased movement of experience, intentionality as hypothesis and religious experience as cooperative and communal.

First, in Dewey's phenomenology of experience, the individual (or self) and the inquiry that the individual undertakes always point to something beyond themselves. While this phenomenology of experience relates the self to the universe, it does not (in contrast to the third phenomenological commitment) constitute the existence (or Being) of the universe. In *A Common Faith*, Dewey reveals how imaginative adjustment fulfills this ostensive function: "the idea of thoroughgoing and deep-seated harmonizing of the self with the Universe (as a name for the totality of conditions with which the self is connected) operates only through imagination . . . [and] [a]n 'adjustment' possesses the will rather than is its express product" (LW 9:14). Unlike accommodation or adaptation, adjustment produces more than a small change. Rather, it is the imagined integration of the self with the whole—"the will" to pursue "an ideal, an imaginative projection."<sup>19</sup> Adjustment can be experienced in, for instance, the activity of Kundalini Yoga (deep meditation to

reach a state of “oneness” between the self and the cosmos) and the Buddhist practice of asceticism (the denial of all earthly pleasures to realize the union of self and world in the state of Nirvana). The Yoga practitioner and the Buddhist ascetic seek to imaginatively project their experience beyond the actual self and situation; to adjust the entire self to all the conditions in the known universe; and to thereby unify the real with the ideal. In other words, their aim is to experience what Dewey calls “the religious.”

Second, inquiry points to something beyond itself, namely, the immediate and qualitatively rich phase of experience known as primary experience. Kenneth Chandler summarizes Dewey’s three-phase movement of experience in the following way: “The first is the primary phase of ordinary experience . . . followed by the second the intervention of systematic thinking which results in the refined objects of knowledge; followed by a third, which is the return to the first phase . . . which preserves the meaning of the second stage within itself while returning to the concrete immediacy of the first.”<sup>20</sup> The three phases of experience imitate the natural ebb and flow of the sea tides, a movement from primary to secondary experience and back again. In a broadly phenomenological sense, the return to primary experience resembles the doubling back toward everyday lived experience, toward what Husserl refers to as the “life-world,” “the only real world,” “the world [that] is pre-given to us,” and “our normal, unbroken, coherent life.”<sup>21</sup>

The last two features of Dewey’s phenomenology of experience—intentionality as hypothesis and religious experience as cooperative and communal—prove to be more controversial. Some might object that they stretch the meaning of the term ‘phenomenology’ beyond recognition (particularly, beyond the scope of phenomenologists’ three central commitments). As previously noted, phenomenologists understand intentionality as the meaningful projection of subjectivity away from the objective (and scientifically known) world. Does Dewey’s phenomenology of experience have a comparable notion of intentionality? According to Frank X. Ryan, “intentionality [for Dewey] signifies neither a subjective ‘mental inexistence’ [of, for instance, Franz Brentano] nor secured terminal objects . . . [but] takes the form of the hypothesis ‘if x then y,’ where y—an ‘end in view’—is what would be achieved if x—existent entities employed as data and instruments in coordinated activity—successfully procures y.”<sup>22</sup> Intentionality for Dewey is not a subject standing forth from the objective world. To concede that it is would condemn Dewey to the same dualistic (external-internal, subjective-objective) thinking that many phenomenologists are prone to. Instead, Dewey’s notion of intentionality avoids exclusive reference to either internal/subjective (“mental”) constructs or external/objective things (“independently existing entities”). He is able to evade these dualisms by focusing on the conditional form of the hypothesis, wherein the goal (“end-in-view”) is contained in the consequent and the tools of inquiry belong to the antecedent. In this form, intentionality has instrumental value because achieving the goals of inquiry requires properly designed tools. Moreover, anticipating Heidegger’s notion of “ready-to-hand” by nearly a decade, Dewey claims that the



conceptual tools of inquiry must be funded in primary experience, and thus made readily available for use in secondary experience.

Finally, Dewey insists that when freed from appeals to ignorance and the supernatural, religious experience can help strengthen the bonds of community. Indeed, the religious quality of experience has been responsible for the "enormous expansion of associations formed for educational, political, economic, philanthropic and scientific purposes, which has occurred independently of any religion" (LW 9:42). These groups devote themselves to inquiry and action in support of a cause, such as teaching the arts in public schools (e.g., Americans for the Arts) and building affordable housing (e.g., Habitat for Humanity), without tying their mission to the teachings of an institutionalized religion. So, in adopting the religious *raison d'être* of bridging between the real and ideal, these secular associations enable their members to secure the shared goods (aesthetic, moral, educational, etc.) of community life. "His [i.e., Dewey's philosophy] is a religious philosophy not in the sense that it is concerned with things unseen or supernatural," James Campbell concludes, "[but] in the sense that it attempts to focus human concern on the over-arching ideal of cooperation and community."<sup>23</sup>

### ***With Dewey and the Angels***

Dewey scholar and biographer Alan Ryan claims that "Professor Kestenbaum is plainly friendlier to 'metaphysics' than Dewey would bring himself to be."<sup>24</sup> Ryan objects not to the incompatibility of Kestenbaum's phenomenology and Dewey's pragmatism, but to "a metaphysical account of the transcendental [that] is just what Dewey would not approve of."<sup>25</sup> In an often overlooked letter by Albert Balz to Dewey, Balz makes a mistake similar to Kestenbaum, misunderstanding Dewey's logic as a correspondence theory of truth. Balz asks how factual material "hooks up" or corresponds with ideational material in Dewey's account of inquiry. In response, Dewey disclaims ownership of this perennial problem in epistemology before hinting at his clever solution:

I am in no way an inventor of the problem in a theory of knowledge of the relation to each other of observed factual material on one side and ideational or theoretical material on the other side. The failure of the controversy to arrive at a solution through agreement is an important ground of the idea that it is worth while to take these constituents of controversy out of the ontological context, and note how they look when they are placed in the context of the use they perform and the service they render in the context of *inquiry*. (LBD, p. 335)

What philosophers from Hume to Kant to Descartes to Russell have done, according to Dewey, is to mistake the functional status of tools in inquiry—whether meanings, ideas, sensations, habits, intentions, or others—for their ontological status. In turn, they have granted these tools "ontological reference apart from inquiry," which unnecessarily limits inquiry's domain. But, as Dewey insists in his

*Logic*, inquiry is “autonomous.” According to what might be called Dewey’s ‘rule of autonomous inquiry,’ first, inquiry “does not depend on anything extraneous to inquiry,” and second, constraints on inquiry (for instance, logical forms and operations) “are to be determined, if at all, by means of what is disclosed as the outcome of inquiry” (LW 12:28).

To overcome this historical tendency to translate the functional into the ontological (and to thereby constrain inquiry’s legitimate domain), Dewey undertakes the reverse operation. Thus, Dewey “convert[s] the *ontological*, as prior to inquiry, into the logical as occupied wholly and solely with what takes place in the conduct of inquiry as an ever-going concern” (LBD, p. 336). To illustrate how he accomplishes this task, we might first consider the common-sense way of perceiving physical objects. One typically views “real things” as discrete, separable objects, the existence of which is independent of how they are experienced. For Dewey, this realist approach is unacceptable. Instead, when objects are “over and above board,” or outside of inquiry, they become the qualitatively rich (“ontological”) things or *res* of primary experience; once objects undergo inquiry, they convert into the (“logical”) purposes or goals of inquiry. The common-sense approach only impedes effective problem solving by hypostatizing the operative subject-matter of inquiry into dualistic realms of existence, such as appearance versus reality, scientific versus common-sense experience and faith-based versus rational-based systems of belief. So, to avoid bifurcating reality into twin universes, it is incumbent upon the inquirer to treat an “object” functionally, that is, as either a thing of primary experience or as an “objective of inquiry” (LW 12:122).

Dewey’s union of the ideal and the real under the heading of religious likewise reflects an attempt to “convert the ontological . . . into the logical” by showing that religious is a quality of lived experience, not of a supernatural thing, church, object of reverence, divine idol or realm of supersensible objects. To do otherwise endangers the process of inquiry by bifurcating reality into pre-given realms of religious and nonreligious objects; the former transcending the experiential conditions of the latter. This dualistic account threatens the inquirer with unobservable conditions which he or she cannot—or at least not without some difficulty—transform for the sake of achieving the ends or objectives of inquiry. So, while Kestenbaum’s phenomenological reading proves to be ambitious in its interpretive license and selective use of passages from *A Common Faith*, it fails to capture Dewey’s own understanding of the relation between the ontological and the logical in the context of inquiry. In rejecting the naturalism and instrumentalism so central to his pragmatist philosophy, Kestenbaum overlooks Dewey’s own explicit rejection of any metaphysical account of transcendence.

To conclude, there are at least two strategies for effectively criticizing Kestenbaum’s phenomenological reading of *A Common Faith*. According to the first strategy, one identifies his evasion of Dewey’s instrumentalism and naturalism as the primary weakness in his phenomenological interpretation. So, while Kestenbaum gives “Dewey’s transgressions [from his naturalism and instrumen-

talism] a sustained and appreciative hearing" (GSI, p. 1), he exercises far too much license in reading these "transgressions" through a strong phenomenological filter. Those who embrace this first strategy admit that while Dewey is not a Husserl or a Merleau-Ponty, he is nonetheless a phenomenologist in his own right. Unfortunately, the last part of this strategy succumbs to the objection that a Deweyan phenomenology of experience defies any reasonable definition of the term 'phenomenology'—particularly in terms of the three commitments. According to a second strategy, one focuses on Dewey's understanding of the religious as deeply rooted in the union of the real and ideal. As Michael Eldridge observes, the "Deweyan struggle to integrate ideals and reality is set aside by Kestenbaum."<sup>26</sup> In place of Dewey's view of the religious, Kestenbaum substitutes faith in a realm of super-sensible or transcendent entities. This account commits the same metaphysical mistake that Dewey wished to remedy in his logic, namely, positing supernatural objects or existences prior to inquiry so as to predetermine (or prejudge) what in inquiry is quintessentially meaningful. In this way, Kestenbaum offends Dewey's rule of autonomous inquiry, according to which the meaning of its terms are subject to determination *only* relative to the operational standards found within—not outside of or prior to—inquiry. This second strategy is clearly more successful than the first. It supports the unequivocal conclusion that the mainstream Dewey scholar's naturalistic-instrumentalist interpretation of Dewey's *A Common Faith*, not Kestenbaum's phenomenological reading, proves to be with Dewey—that is, "on the side of the angels" (LBD, p. 335).

### **Acknowledgements**

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### **Notes**

1. Originally, John Dewey's *A Common Faith* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1934) was given as the Terry Lectures of 1934. The title of Kestenbaum's book was taken from the concluding sentence of Dewey's essay, "Experience and Objective Idealism" (MW 3:128-144).

2. Victor Kestenbaum, *The Grace and Severity of the Ideal: John Dewey and the Transcendent* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 176; hereafter GSI.

3. This idea was independently suggested to me by Vincent Colapietro and Frank X. Ryan.

4. Albert G. A. Balz and John Dewey, "A Letter to Mr. Dewey Concerning John Dewey's Doctrine of Possibility, Published Together with His Reply," *The Journal of Philosophy*, 46, no. 11 (May 1949): 313-42, 335; hereafter LBD.

5. According to Heidegger, "Phenomenology [is] the science of phenomena" where "'phenomena' signifies that which shows itself in itself, the manifest." *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962), 50-51. While phenomenology involves the study of essences, it does not privilege essence over existence. Instead, phenomenologists try to return essences back to their rightful place in existence. Indeed, for phenomenologists, the thing-in-itself is in the phenomena, not behind all appearances

(as the Kantian *ding an sich*), leading Husserl in his earlier works to order his fellow phenomenologists, “To the things themselves!” Phenomenologists also consider the world to be already there prior to the onset of reflective thought. See Edmund Husserl, *Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy*, trans. Q. Lauer (New York: Harper and Row, 1965).

6. For Husserl, intentionality constitutes the objects of conscious experience. So, he states, “objects exist for me, and are for me what they are, only as objects of actual and possible consciousness.” From his *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, trans. Dorian Cairns (Den Hague: Nijhoff, 1973). What remains after the phenomenological reduction or *epoche* is some version of transcendental subjectivity—or course, minus any trace of the naturalistic world. For Heidegger, intentionality manifests with the being or *Dasein* of the human agent. His notion of being-in-the-world or *In-der-Welt-sein* points beyond (or transcends) pure subjectivity and implicates the already engaged relation between a human and the world, an engagement that overcomes the dichotomy between subject and object.

7. Where phenomenologists often disagree is in how to make sense of what is meant by subjectivity, or individual being, in its relation to the world, or Being. Husserl understands subjectivity as a windowless entity independent of the world’s Being, whereas Heidegger and many phenomenologists after him see it implicating the world beyond the subject.

8. Kestenbaum’s phenomenology is influenced most notably by the thought and writings of Merleau-Ponty. See Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception* (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1964). For a more comprehensive account of Kestenbaum’s phenomenology and its relation to Dewey’s philosophy, see his *The Phenomenological Sense of John Dewey: Habit and Meaning* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1977).

9. Tom Burke, *Dewey’s New Logic: A Reply to Russell* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 23.

10. H. S. Thayer, “Dewey and the Theory of Knowledge,” *Transactions of the C.S. Peirce Society*, 26, no. 4 (Fall 1990): 443-58.

11. See, for instance, Dwight Welch, “John Dewey’s Theism” (paper presented at the thirty-first annual conference of The Society for the Advancement of American Philosophy, Birmingham, Alabama, March 4-6, 2004) [http://www.american-philosophy.org/archives/past\\_conference\\_programs/pc2004/submissions/tp-26.htm](http://www.american-philosophy.org/archives/past_conference_programs/pc2004/submissions/tp-26.htm) (accessed Feb. 10, 2004).

12. Another way to attempt to naturalize religious faith, besides Dewey’s, is to treat it as a subjective sense of certainty, an attitude or conviction that cannot be properly subjected to rational scrutiny. See Richard Taylor, “Faith,” in *Exploring Philosophy*, ed. Steven M. Cahn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 202-205. However, Taylor’s tactic bifurcates the universe of discourse into either beliefs as faith-based or beliefs as reason-based. Others, such as Michael Scriven, criticize this move as disingenuous to the ordinary sense of the term “faith”—that is, an objectionable equivocation—which in day-to-day discourse means just a heightened sense of confidence. See Michael Scriven, *Primary Philosophy* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), 98-99.

13. Dewey’s student-cum-critic, Randolphe Bourne, objected to how the instrumental and naturalism in his former teacher’s philosophy remove any opportunity for transcendence: “The defect of any philosophy of ‘adaptation’ or ‘adjustment,’ [such as Dewey’s] even when it means adjustment to changing, living experience, is that there is no provision for thought or experience getting beyond itself. You never transcend anything. You grow, but your spirit never jumps out of your skin to go on wild adventures.” “Twilight of the Idols,” in *The Radical Will* (New York: Urizon Books, 1977), 344.

14. In an address Dewey gave at a conference on “The Scientific Spirit and Democratic Faith,” reprinted as “The Democratic Faith and Education” (LW 15:251-60), he draws attention to five “articles of faith” embraced by nineteenth-century “social idealists” that were

demonstrated to be false through subsequent experience and testing.

15. Blaise Pascal's Wager is one account of why it is strategically rational to believe, for the pay-off if God exists is eternal reward; the cost if one does not believe and God exists, on the other hand, is eternal damnation. Karl Marx lends support to this tendency, which he calls "fetishism": "we must have recourse to the mist-enveloped regions of the religious world. In that world the productions of the human brain appear as independent things endowed with life, and entering into relation both with one another and the human race." *Das Capital*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Progress, 1965), 72.

16. The concept of "mediate immediacy" and the cyclical connection between knowing and having is insightfully developed by Frank X. Ryan in "Primary Experience as Settled Meaning" *Philosophy Today* 38 (Spring 1994): 29-42. Although the sea tides metaphor is mine, much of the account I owe to Ryan, whose interpretation is still, unfortunately, considered the unorthodox view in much of contemporary Dewey studies.

17. James W. Garrison and Emanuel I. Shargel, "Dewey's Experience and Nature and Husserl's Crisis: A Surprising Convergence of Themes," in *Philosophy of Education* 1986, ed. Nicholas Burbules (Urbana, IL: Philosophy of Education Society, 1987), 255-64.

18. Charles S. Peirce, "On Phenomenology" in *The Essential Peirce*, vol. 2, ed. Peirce Edition Project (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1998), 147. This quote was suggested by Vincent Colapietro.

19. Hans Joas calls this process of imaginative projection "creative idealization": "[C]reative idealization allows us to imagine a wholeness which never existed, never will exist, and yet still seems to us to be more real than all partial realizations." *The Genesis of Values*, trans. Gregory Moore (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 115.

20. Kenneth Chandler, "Dewey's Phenomenology of Knowledge," *Philosophy Today*, 21, no. 174 (Spring 1977), 43-55, 51.

21. Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*, trans. D. Carr (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 49, 142, 144.

22. Ryan, "Primary Experience as Settled Meaning," 34. Also, see Ryan, "Fathoming the Bottomless Lake of Consciousness: The Phenomenological Pragmatism of Robert E. Innis," *Contemporary Pragmatism* 2, no. 2 (December 2005), 145-161.

23. See James Campbell, *Understanding John Dewey* (Chicago: Open Court, 1985), 268.

24. Alan Ryan, Review of Kestenbaum's *The Grace and Severity of the Ideal*, *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews* (May 8, 2004) <http://ndpr.icaap.org/content/archives/2004/5/ryan-kestenbaum.html> (accessed Dec. 31, 2004).

25. Ibid. Damico likewise states that "[Dewey's] [p]ragmatism involves a new conception of reality that expands but does not transcend experience, a new indication of phenomena investigated, and new criteria for governing explanations and judgments." See Alfonso Damico, "Analysis and Advocacy: Pragmatism and the Study of Politics," *Polity* (Winter 1974): 193-208, 197-98.

26. Michael Eldridge, "Struggling with Dewey's Legacy: Kestenbaum's Challenge," *Studi Sulla Formazione* (October 2003), 1-11, 7.

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