



J. R. Shook and J. A. Good (eds.)

*John Dewey's Philosophy of Spirit, with the 1897 Lecture on Hegel*, Fordham University Press, New York 2010, pp. 197, by Roberto Gronda.

The book reviewed here makes available an important lecture on Hegel's philosophy of spirit that Dewey delivered at the University of Chicago in 1897. Less than one hundred pages long, the lecture aimed to introduce students to a critical understanding of the third part of Hegel's *Encyclopedia of Philosophical Science*. It is preceded by two introductory essays written by the editors – namely, Shook's *Dewey's Naturalized Philosophy of Spirit and Religion* and Good's *Rereading Dewey's "Permanent Hegelian Deposit"*. Broadly speaking, they are devoted respectively a) to highlighting the fundamental tenets of Dewey's naturalistic philosophy of spirit and religion, and the different phases through which he passed in turning from his original adhesion to Calvinism into his later acceptance of humanistic naturalism; and b) to establishing the influence exerted by Hegel on Dewey's thought. Their immediate function consists in providing a contextualization of the lecture, both in the light of Dewey's further philosophical development and in relation to his effort at coming to terms with the complex Anglo-American idealist tradition in which he had been nurtured.

This contextualizing work is particularly welcomed. In fact, the decade that Dewey spent in Chicago (1894-1904) is undoubtedly the most enigmatic (and, at the very same time, the most fascinating) period of his whole life; and it is highly probable that the difficulties that Deweyan scholars usually encounter when dealing with it may affect the comprehension of the lecture itself. As is well known, the greatest part of the interpretative problems that arise quite naturally when a historical reconstruction of Dewey's philosophical development is attempted are due to Dewey's willingness to integrate different languages and perspectives into a single and coherent conceptual framework. The direction of this long process of drifting away from Hegelianism is not controversial: the combination of such different approaches as theory of evolution, functional psychology, and (plausibly, but this is a highly debated point among interpreters) Hegelian idealism eventually drove him to abandon his early neo-Hegelianism in favor of a more empirically oriented, experimental account of experience and thought. What is still lacking is precisely an accurate study of the history of his emancipation from neo-Hegelianism, and, more specifically, an account of the role Hegel's philosophy played in redirecting the course of Dewey's philosophy.

From this viewpoint, the 1897 lecture on Hegel constitutes a fundamental source for gaining an understanding of what Dewey was aiming at. Undoubtedly, it provides decisive evidence that, at the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century, Dewey still viewed Hegel as an important philosophical interlocutor. Therefore, any reading suggesting that Dewey immersed himself in the study of contemporary scientific psychology as a way to escape the pitfalls of German idealism can be considered as manifestly unfounded. However Shook and Good are not content with this minimal and rather uncontroversial conclusion. On the contrary, they believe that a much stronger consequence can be derived from Dewey's interest in Hegel's

philosophy of spirit. In their view, the latter stands out as a reliable sign of Dewey being persuaded that a reflection on Hegelian philosophy can supply him with powerful tools for achieving the goal of shaping his new approach to philosophical problems (pp. vii-viii). More generally, the fundamental assumption lying at the basis of Shook and Good's interpretation is that Dewey's mature instrumentalism and naturalism – whose main tenets will first be announced to the world in the *Studies in Logical Theory* (1903), and then further developed in his mature works – cannot be properly understood unless one pays attention to the complex revision of Hegelianism that he had undertaken during the 90's, of which the 1897 lecture on Hegel is a remarkable moment. As is evident, the latter thesis is much more difficult to defend, because it involves some very strong methodological and interpretative assumptions – such as the grounding hypothesis that this lecture on Hegel provides some valuable insights having direct bearings on a correct interpretation of Dewey's philosophy. Indeed, it is evident that Dewey's lecture on Hegel is avowedly expository: in many cases, he seems to limit himself to reporting Hegel's argument, rather than trying to express his own philosophical position. Therefore, it would be rash (to say the least) to conclude that Dewey is actually defending all the theses that he expounds, because it would entail that he is willing to endorse the whole Hegelian philosophy of spirit. Obviously, Shook and Good are aware of these problems, and they attempt to prevent possible objections by appealing to a modest interpretative strategy, which prescribes a more cautious approach to the text. Its leading principle is that a correct evaluation of the theoretical relevance of the lecture can be gained only through a continuous reference to the other books and articles that Dewey wrote in the very same years, as well as in his mature phase. It is indisputably true that when Dewey's lecture on Hegel is presented as a tile in the complex mosaic formed by his overall production, the picture that Shook and Good aim to defend becomes much more convincing.

This last remark sheds light on an aspect which should not be overlooked. It is worth noting indeed that the book in its entirety is intended to have a militant tone, so that some of its most interesting features risk to passing unnoticed if it is read and used as a critical edition, with textual apparatus and commentary. In the *Preface* of the volume, the editors write that there is a “debate, which shows no sign of abating even now, about the extent to which his later works contain a mixture of Hegelian and pragmatist element” (p. vii). Since Sterling Lamprecht's article on the idealist source of Dewey's logic (1925)<sup>1</sup>, scholars have been discussing the plausibility of an idealist reading of Dewey's philosophy; and since Morton White's widely influential book *The Origin of Dewey's Instrumentalism*<sup>2</sup>, it has become common to argue that “[Dewey] made a complete break from Hegelianism around the turn of the century” (vii). Now, the editors claim that this image takes Deweyan scholars captive, because it prevents them from seeing that Dewey's philosophical development is much more complicated and nuanced than has typically been considered. The two editors have devoted their greatest efforts, both historical and theoretical, to the criticism of this standard interpretation. The results of their previous research – which is condensed in two seminal books, namely Shook's *Dewey's Empirical Theory of Knowledge and Reality* and Good's *A Search for Unity in Diversity*<sup>3</sup> – lay the ground for understanding the reasons for which they

<sup>1</sup> S. Lamprecht, *An Idealistic Source of Instrumentalist Logic*, in *Mind*, 33 (1924), pp. 415-427. See also F. C. Schiller, *Instrumentalism and Idealism*, in *Mind*, 34 (1925), pp. 75-79.

<sup>2</sup> M. White, *The Origin of Dewey's Instrumentalism*, Columbia University Press, New York 1943.

<sup>3</sup> J. R. Shook, *Dewey's Empirical Theory of Knowledge and Reality*, Vanderbilt University Press, Nashville 2000; J. A. Good, *A Search for Unity in Diversity: the “Permanent Hegelian Deposit” in the Philosophy of John Dewey*, Lexington Books, Oxford 2006.

ascribe such importance to this text. Thanks to their groundbreaking work on Dewey's intellectual sources, the two editors of the present volume did manage to dramatically change the shape of Deweyan scholarship, by setting a new agenda of issues that deserve attention. It is now widely accepted that a distinction should be drawn between Hegel and neo-Hegelians; that the greatest attention should be paid to the strictly philosophical (not simply personal) influence exerted on Dewey by the St. Louis Hegelians; that Dewey never abandoned idealism, but rather undertook an original attempt to naturalize its main tenets; that his reading of William James' *Principles of Psychology* did not represent a radical break in his philosophical development, but on the contrary acted as a spur that allowed him to refine those original insights which he had formulated during his idealist apprenticeship; that Dewey does not belong to the pragmatist tradition, and that his realization of Peirce's relevance for his own philosophical project has to be dated to the second decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is in light of this complex framework that the proper significance of the text here presented, and the multi-faceted motives that prompted Shook and Good to edit it, stand out in their clarity. The proper function of Dewey's lecture on Hegel is that of confirming – somehow indirectly, because of its expository nature – a very complex and articulated historical and philosophical interpretation whose main tenets are formulated elsewhere, namely in those books and articles through which Shook and Good took part in the still ongoing debate on Dewey's early philosophy and, in general, his overall philosophical development.

Once the militant tone of the publication has been highlighted – pointing out that the philosophical value of the whole book lies as much in its bearing on Deweyan scholarship as in the results that the concrete work of historical reconstruction achieves –, and its main theoretical coordinates have been defined, it is possible to start the discussion proper. I intend to proceed as follows. First of all, I will discuss briefly the main points of Dewey's lecture on Hegel, relying on the illuminating remarks provided by Good in his essay, which, amongst other things, is a very useful guide to reading Dewey's text. Trying to summarize Dewey's exposition would be useless, because, in many cases, it would amount to a mere repetition of Hegel's arguments. So, I will limit myself to underline those aspects that have the greatest significance in the economy of Dewey's thought, and, consequently, provide the best standpoint from which to understand the permanent deposit Hegelianism left on Deweyan philosophy. After that, I will focus my attention on a couple of points which – though they have not been stressed enough – corroborate the interpretation that Good advances. Moreover, I will raise objections to two theoretical assumptions that I think are not fully supported by facts, but that are accepted by both Good and Shook. Then I will outline what I believe to be the most interesting aspects of Shook's argument. The decision not to follow the publication order of the essays is a direct consequence of their different "proximity" to the subject matter of the lecture. Indeed, while Good's contribution wrestles closely with the text, Shook looks at it from some distance. The different perspective points adopted by Good and Shook yield an intriguing result: they respectively provides a foreground and a background knowledge of Dewey's complex relationship with Hegelian philosophy. The best description of the theoretical presuppositions and objectives of their deliberate division of work is given by the editors themselves in the *Preface* of the volume:

"We propose in our chapters to explore Dewey's philosophy of religion in general and his inheritance from Hegel of a 'philosophy of spirit' in particular. We agree that Dewey did have a philosophy of spirit, that it was heavily indebted to Hegelian themes, and that Dewey's resulting philosophy of religion is a key component of his social and political theory" (ix).

Finally, I will express a general reservation concerning a methodological and interpretative assumption that the editors accept without questioning, but which is – in my opinion – in need of revision. Obviously, the revision is not intended to be a rejection of their approach, but rather an attempt of refining some of the theoretical presuppositions that lie at the basis of the conclusions they draw from their analysis of Dewey's lecture on Hegel.

As has already been remarked, the lecture is characterized by an expository approach to its subject matter. For this reason, Dewey integrates his exposition of Hegel's philosophy of spirit with pieces of information about his life and with a schematic account of Hegel's most important theses of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Consequently, Dewey's lecture is naturally divided into three parts. The first thirty-four paragraphs are devoted to highlighting the main events of Hegel's boyhood, his formation at the seminary in Tübingen, and his philosophical development during the years that he spent as a private tutor in Berne and Frankfurt. The three central paragraphs focus on the *Phenomenology of Spirit*: Dewey's main interest here concerns the philosophical reasons that led Hegel to break with his former friend Schelling. From paragraph 38 to paragraph 155 Dewey presents Hegel's *Philosophy of Spirit*, and, as Good observes, "Dewey closely tracks Hegel's outline" (73).

According to Good, three aspects deserve particular attention. To begin with, it is worth noting that the most original part of the lecture is the first one. Indeed, freed from the necessity of following the course of Hegel's argument, Dewey formulates what he believes are the fundamental tenets of Hegelian philosophy. Therefore, it is the opening section that one has to take into consideration in order to see which Hegelian themes drew Dewey's attention, and what image of Hegel he intended to propose to his students. Dewey defines Hegel as a "great actualist", meaning with this expression that Hegel "had the greatest respect, both in his thought and in his practice, for what actually amounted to something, actually succeeded in getting outward form" (97). Good rightly remarks that nothing is more distant from Dewey than the often-repeated charges that Hegel's idealism is a reduction of the external world to mind, or that it betrays the concreteness of experience. Hegel, Dewey argues, is "never more hard in his speech, hard as steel is hard, than when dealing with mere ideals, vain opinions and sentiments and sentiments which have not succeeded in connecting themselves with this actual world" (97). It is not a case that Dewey pays the greatest attention to an interesting trait of Hegel's method: "self-effacement [is] the first law of the intellect" (94). Individual opinions must be suppressed in order to let things speak for themselves, because "the highest activity of thought is that which will make itself the pure expression of the facts" (95). If these assertions are put in relation with Dewey's powerful insight that, for Hegel, "thinking is simply the translation of fact into its real meaning" (96), a clear image begins to take shape. Dewey does not lean toward a metaphysical reading of the Hegelian philosophy of spirit; on the contrary, he is fascinated by those realistic aspects of Hegel's thought that found an objective, non-spectatorial theory of knowledge. Good implicitly suggests that if one were compelled to indicate the single Hegelian theme that left the greatest deposit on Dewey's mature philosophy, the actualist conception of thought would probably be the most natural choice. The fact that Dewey stresses Hegel's rejection of the idea of mind as passive spectator is remarkable since, to use Good's words, "the rejection of mind/body dualism, faculty psychology, and the passive spectator theory of knowledge are all prominent features of Dewey's mature thought" (64).

Secondly, Good informs the reader that Dewey's sketch of Hegel's philosophical development relies mainly on three sources: Caird's book on Hegel, from which he quotes extensively, Royce's articles on German philosophy, and Rosenkranz's groundbreaking monography entitled *Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's Leben*. According to Good, Dewey's

highly selective use of secondary literature is remarkable because it provides evidence that he consciously decided to exploit only those texts which were functional to the constitution of his anti-metaphysical reading of Hegel. For this reason, for instance, Dewey does not mention Rudolf Haym's *Hegel und Seine Zeit*, in which a reading of Hegel's thought as the official philosophy of Prussian conservatism is formulated. On the contrary, precisely because of its insistence on Hegel's appreciation for the concreteness of life, Dewey cannot help but appreciating the account of Hegelian philosophy provided by Rosenkranz – a major representative of the Center Hegelians who defended a third way alternative to the conservatism of the right wing Hegelians as well as the atheist and revolutionary thought of the left wing Hegelians. It was Rosenkranz who, having gained access to Hegel's early unpublished writings and to his short political essays, was able to elaborate an image of his whole work as a grandiose attempt to come to terms with the "problems raised by the emergence of modern thought and culture" (62-63). By exploiting Rosenkranz's insights on the fundamental tone of Hegelian philosophy, Dewey lays stress upon the fact that, contrary to Kant and Fichte, "Hegel's original impulse was not from the study of philosophy as such" (108). Obviously, Dewey does not intend to deny that Hegel eventually came to express his ideas in a highly technical language; however, the problems that prompted Hegel to undertake serious studies were not strictly philosophical, but rather political, historical, and theological. Good rightly puts great emphasis on Dewey's insistence on this fact: it is a sign that apart from any specific agreement on particular issues, Dewey's acceptance of Hegel's philosophy is based on a profound sympathy with the spirit and intentions that animate Hegel's thought. Moreover, it sheds light on the type of philosophical work Dewey considered worth carrying out, as well as on the kind of philosopher he aimed at becoming: according to Dewey, the genuine philosopher is the one who faces the true problems of life, without losing himself in technicalities that have no bearing on the solution of the concrete difficulties that men encounter in their daily experience.

The third point to which Good draws the attention is Dewey's interest in Hegel's theory of causation. Good remarks that Dewey believes this theme to be so important that he decides to digress from the argument of Hegel's *Philosophy of Mind* in order to clarify its theoretical relevance. As is well known, in his logical texts Hegel distinguishes between two different ways of conceiving the relation of cause to effect: the point of view of understanding and the point of view of reason. While the understanding severs the connection between causes and their effects, assuming that they are ontologically independent, reason shows their intimate unity, by pointing out that they are simple moments within an organic process. No ontological distinction can be drawn between them because a cause becomes a cause only when it produces its effect. Therefore, Hegel argues that, to use Good's incisive expression, "cause and effect are more fruitfully seen as reciprocal moments within an organic process rather than linear relations" (75). Dewey enthusiastically endorses the Hegelian theory of causation, and puts it at the basis of his own conception of reality, life, and reason. So, for instance, Dewey writes: "each member of the animal body is cause and effect of every other: each organ is at once means and ends of every other" (115). Moreover, the organicist theory of causation is also the key to understanding Dewey's theory of emotion and his concomitant critique of mind/body dualism. Strangely enough, Good deals with it only incidentally, but this aspect is so relevant that it should have deserved a larger treatment than a few lines in a footnote. In fact, Dewey's rejection of the Darwinian "expressionist" conception of emotion – according to which emotions are ontologically and epistemically independent from their bodily expressions – relies precisely upon the refusal of distinguishing between an inner cause (the emotion) and an outer effect (the organic mod-

ification). Finally, Dewey's organicist view of the means-ends relationship reflects the very same logic of Hegel's organicist theory of causation: as a cause is a cause if and only if it produces its effect, so a means is a means only because it actually leads to the end in which it finds its complete realization. Thence, the Deweyan theory of rationality, as expounded in *Logic: Theory of Inquiry* and in *Theory of Valuation*, should not be seen as departing from his early idealism; on the contrary, it is a variation on the theme of the Hegelian insistence on the essential continuity between cause and effect.

Two brief remarks and a reservation may be added to complete what has been said. First of all, contrary to William Wallace's translation decision, Dewey uses *Spirit* rather than *Mind* in order to express the German word *Geist*. Through this terminological choice, Dewey aims at preventing any mentalistic reading of Hegelian philosophy grounded upon an erroneous assimilation of Hegel's conceptual framework to a Berkeleyan-like subjective idealism. Therefore, Good's interpretation is not only plausible and consistent from a theoretical point of view; it is also founded on sound textual evidence. Secondly, Dewey puts great emphasis on the notion of meaning as the key to understanding the essence of Hegel's philosophy. From the very beginning of his philosophical career – at least from *Knowledge as Idealization* (1887) –, Dewey had been devoting great effort to clarify those intellectual operations through which sensuous material is enriched by new meaning. Accordingly, when he states that, for Hegel, “thinking is the translation of fact into its real meaning” (p. 96), Dewey is reading Hegelian philosophy through the spectacles of his previous theoretical achievements: by doing so, he focuses his attention on the centrality of the process of idealization for a full-fledged idealism. Meaning and idealization are two intertwined threads that run through Dewey's early production, and lie at the basis of his mature attempt of defining the relationship between primary and secondary experience. What is worth noting here is that, since Dewey's confrontation with Hegel concerns precisely the way to account for the relationship existing amongst thought, meaning, and reality, it is a pivotal episode in the history of Dewey's theoretical effort to formulate a consistent account of meaningfulness of experience. Indeed, Dewey found in Hegel's absolute idealism a fully developed theory of objective reason, thanks to which he managed to overcome those pitfalls which stem from the dualistic assumptions that had infected, among others, Kant and T. Hill Green's critical idealism. Consequently, Good is right in highlighting that Dewey's emancipation from the specific brand of neo-Hegelianism developed by Green cannot be understood unless one pays attention to the contribution afforded by his assimilation of Hegel's thought.

What I find less convincing in Good's argument is the too sharp distinction that he draws between Hegel and Neo-Hegelianism, and his thesis (shared by Shook) that the young Dewey “made the same sort of Kantian move as the British neo-Hegelians” by appealing to the idea of “perfect personality [...] as a way to ground philosophy” (58). Starting with the first issue, it is important to note that, far from being a monolithic reality, neo-Hegelianism was a highly complex movement of thought, which refuses to be boiled down to a set of doctrines held by all its members. This is particularly evident when books and articles written by neo-Hegelians during the 1880's are taken into account. Indeed, in 1883 Francis Bradley publishes the first edition of his *Principles of Logic*: in the preface he explicitly affirms that “I never could have called myself a Hegelian, partly because I can not say that I have mastered his system, and partly because I could not accept what seems his main principle”; and he adds that “as for the ‘Hegelian School’ which exists in our reviews,

I know no one who has met with it anywhere else"<sup>4</sup>. In 1887 Andrew Seth publishes his *Hegelianism and Personality*, in which Absolute Idealism is rejected in favor of a form of personalism largely indebted to Leibniz's idea of monadology<sup>5</sup>. One year later, Haldane replies to Seth's criticism by reminding him of the original spirit of neo-Kantianism – a label used by Haldane to refer to the very same historical fact that Good and Shook name neo-Hegelianism –, that is, its being an analysis of actual knowledge rather than a metaphysical theory of reality<sup>6</sup>. Therefore, to assume that Dewey was opposed to neo-Hegelianism *überhaupt* would be a too simplistic interpretation of his relationship with the philosophical tradition in which he grew up.

The impression that Dewey's rejection of neo-Hegelianism is wholesale is probably due to a partial misreading of an important letter to William James, dated May 05, 1891. While discussing the well-known passage of the *Principles of Psychology*, in which James criticizes neo-Hegelian theory of consciousness as formulated by Green and Caird, Dewey states that "Hegel seems to me intensely modern in spirit [...], and I do not like to see him dressed up as Scholasticus Redivivus – although of course his friends, the professed Hegelians, are mainly responsible for that". Now, it is true that Dewey is willing to draw a distinction between Hegel and (some of) his Anglo-American followers. However, as the rest of the letter shows rather clearly, the distinction is much less radical than it may seem at first glance. Indeed, contrary to James' general criticism, Dewey is careful to distinguish Green's neo-Kantian and, consequently, substantially dualistic analysis of consciousness from Caird's Hegelian-inspired theory of self. What Dewey is aiming at, therefore, is less to contrast Hegel and neo-Hegelians than to defend his own position from James' attack. In the context of his discussion with James, Dewey prefers to use the terms of his opponents, and to clarify his own view – which is strongly dependent on Caird's version of absolute idealism – through a redefinition of those assumptions that led James to that erroneous theoretical conclusion.

In any case, from what has been said, it does not follow that Good's distinction between Hegel's philosophy and neo-Hegelianism is illegitimate and completely useless from a historiographical point of view. In reality, it is worth being preserved for at least one fundamental reason. It highlights the fact that one cannot understand Dewey's "psychological" version of absolute idealism unless attention is paid to the Anglo-American philosophical tradition in whose terms he came to assimilate Hegel's thought. Indeed, the philosophical problems Dewey perceived as being the most urgent are not identical to those with which Hegel was concerned. Three differences are particularly relevant here. First of all, the extremely rapid development of psychological and biological sciences put the problem of providing an account of perception at the center of philosophical concerns. Secondly, Hegel's philosophy of objective spirit became a widely accepted theoretical platform that supplied sociologists, linguists, and anthropologists with a sound conceptual framework. Philosophers as different as Comte and Hegel could be read as recommending the same solution to the issues concerning the nature of society, and the relevance of the latter for the genesis of individual mind. Thirdly, Hegelian philosophy was interpreted as a powerful tool for defending a religious view of the world. Indeed, Hegel's multifaceted concept of spirit was transformed into a metaphysical notion that supported a strong claim concerning the essence of reality. When all these things are considered, it then becomes possible to fully ap-

<sup>4</sup> F. H. Bradley, *Principles of Logic*, K. Paul, Trench & Co., London 1883, iv.

<sup>5</sup> A. Seth, *Hegelianism and Personality*, W. Blackwood and Sons, Edinburgh and London 1887.

<sup>6</sup> R. B. Haldane, *Hegel and His Recent Critics*, in *Mind*, Vol. 13, No. 52 (1888), p. 586. See also A. Seth's reply in *Hegel and His Recent Critics*, in *Mind*, Vol. 14, No. 53 (1889).

preciate the historiographical importance of the distinction drawn by Good between Hegelian philosophy and the neo-Hegelian tradition: it makes clear that Dewey's reading of Hegel was neo-Hegelian, and that even in those cases in which he contrasted Hegel's original doctrines with some idiosyncratic theses upheld by some of the neo-Hegelians, he was still moving *within* a distinctively neo-Hegelian framework.

All of these previous remarks shed an important light on Dewey's problematic use of the notion of personality. Good and Shook agree that Dewey's exploitation of the notion of perfect personality in his early writings – and, in particular, in his *Psychology* (1887) – is a reliable sign of his adherence to some form of neo-Hegelianism; and they maintain that it is only through its rejection that Dewey eventually came to formulate a consistent approach to the problems of ethics and logic. It is undoubtedly true that during the 1890's Dewey's philosophy was idealistic, but the shift of attention from the abstractness of his early metaphysical and theological concerns to concrete facts of life paved the way to the development of his later naturalism. In such a reconstruction, the concept of perfect personality acts as a stumbling block to the growth of Dewey's philosophy. What is even more important to note is that, according to Good, what prevented the young Dewey from formulating a thorough idealistic philosophy was that, at that time, he was too Kantian to abandon the view elaborated by British neo-Hegelians. Good's reconstruction goes on as follows: "As he began to criticize the neo-Hegelians, Dewey jettisoned the notion of a transcendent absolute that grounded philosophy [...]. Rather than a move away from Hegel's absolute idealism, this was a move away from neo-Hegelianism and toward Hegel" (58-59).

No one should deny that the very idea of perfect personality is a key neo-Hegelian notion. Moreover, it is also evident that, sometimes and especially in his popular writings, Dewey tends to give a religious tinge to his philosophical theses. By doing so, the wrong impression may be conveyed that in his early phase he was concerned with a quest for a philosophical foundation of Christian belief in a divine personal God. In reality, Dewey's appeal to the notion of perfect personality is part of a complex theoretical strategy aiming at correcting the intrinsic dualism of such neo-Kantians as Thomas Hill Green. Dewey gives the following definition of the idea of perfect personality: it is "the motive, source, and the realization of the life of the individual" (EW 2: 361). Perfect will is, therefore, the *absolute* standpoint an agent has to endorse to avoid inconsistencies caused by the Kantian unwillingness to discard the dogmatic assumption that human reason and will are finite and limited by the existence of a thing-in-itself. That this is Dewey's aim is confirmed by the following remark: when the perfect will is recognized by an agent as the motive of his action, "the source of his concrete actions is no longer the will that the ideal and the actual *ought to be* one [...], but it is the will that they *are* one; and this specific case [...] is the manifestation of this unity" (EW 2: 361). Seen from this perspective, far from being a residual of neo-Kantianism as the editors of the book maintain, Dewey's notion of pure personality stands out as the single theoretical device that warrants the validity of the process of idealization of sensations or, in other words, the process of embodiment of the ideal in material. If this reading is correct, an even stronger continuity in Dewey's philosophical development can be detected. It follows indeed that Dewey never changed his mind about the general philosophical standpoint that should be adopted in order to formulate a sound idealistic philosophy. What Dewey recognized as inadequate and in need of revision is, rather, the technical, specific theory of mental activity that was intended to substantiate that general standpoint. It is at that level that the theoretical import of Dewey's assimilation of Hegel's philosophy becomes evident, as has been proven by Good's brilliant analysis.

Obviously, the reservations advanced here do not affect the value of Good's argument. Indeed, his reconstruction of Dewey's argument is faithful, and the overall picture of what the permanent Hegelian deposit on Deweyan philosophy amounts to is convincing and stimulating. The *philosophical* value of his account consists in the fact that it provides a reliable canon of exegetical interpretation that directs and controls specific theoretical research. So, for instance, it explains in which sense, and to which extent, it is appropriate to encompass both Hegel's and Dewey's later thought under the label of organicism and actualism. At the same time, it corroborates what at first glance may seem a mere suggestion, namely Good's assertion that

“when Dewey reflects on the psychology of individual humans, in works such as *Human Nature and Conduct*, he articulates a philosophy of subject spirit”, and “when he reflects on the history of Western civilization, in works such as *Reconstruction in Philosophy and The Quest for Certainty*, he develops a philosophy of objective spirit” (60).

An accurate historical account paves the way to a more sophisticated and controlled evaluation of possible theoretical similarities between the two later philosophical proposals.

It would be erroneous, however, to conclude that Hegel's influence on Dewey boils down to its effects on the development of the latter's philosophical outlook. Indeed, it was Dewey himself who called attention to the emotional, non-intellectual significance of his encounter with Hegel. In *From Absolutism to Experimentalism*, Dewey states that “Hegel's synthesis of subject and object, matter and spirit, the divine and human, was, however, no mere intellectual formula: it operated as an immense release, a liberation” (LW 5: 153). Therefore, any account that overlooks this “existential” aspect of the Hegelian influence on Dewey would be unsatisfactory because of its incompleteness. Among many other things, Shook's *Dewey's Naturalized Philosophy of Spirit and Religion* intends precisely to highlight how Hegelian philosophy interacts and merges with the whole body of Dewey's religious and ethical convictions, which were formed *before* he came in contact with Hegel and the neo-Hegelian tradition. Accordingly, it aims a) to outline the fundamental traits of Dewey's implicit metaphysics, b) to shed some light on those assumptions that Dewey never discussed or criticized, but that unconsciously shaped his whole philosophical outlook, and c) to point out the intellectual debates in which Dewey took part, and in reference to which he elaborated and refined his conceptual apparatus.

Shook supplies the reader with an intriguing narration about what he calls “Dewey's evolving stance about religion” (7). He distinguishes four phases of Dewey's philosophy of religion and spirit. 1) Dewey's early devotion to Christianity was decisively influenced by his mother's adhesion to New England Congregationalism, even though he gradually came to prefer “the anti-Calvinistic themes of universalism” (6). The first years of his life were characterized by an “instinctive trust in democracy and sympathy with universalism” (20). 2) During the years spent at the University of Vermont, he realized for the first time that universalism and democracy support each other, although he was not ready yet to formulate a comprehensive philosophical view of how they hang together. 3) It was in the light of these interests and theoretical concerns that Dewey assimilated Morris' Hegelian organicist philosophy. The theory of progressive self-realization that Dewey first expounded in his *Psychology* is the most visible fruit of his effort to develop a consistent idealistic view of the place of religion in man's life. Therefore, it was Hegel who provided Dewey with a set of concepts that made it possible to satisfy what Dewey himself calls an intense emotional craving for unity (LW 5: 153). 4) Starting from the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century, Dewey jettisoned

any remnant of theological language, and declined his idealistic convictions within a naturalistic framework. As Shook rightly remarks, "having integrated faith, responsibility, and society", and having developed a sound logic of inquiry, "Dewey's mature philosophy offers a unified and coherent theory of religion, morality, and politics" (20).

The reconstruction articulated by Shook makes evident in which sense, and to what extent, Dewey's "humanistic naturalism is the culmination of [his] search for a philosophy of spirit" (20). Shook's main theses are a) that Dewey's later philosophy plunges its roots in the theological debate in which he took part in the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and b) that Dewey's mature formulations are best understood when seen as more conscious attempts to answer the very same problems that prompted him to study philosophy and to accept the Anglo-American version of Hegelian idealism. So, for instance, Shook rightly notices that the opposition between the two schools of social reform that Dewey discusses at length in *Human Nature and Conduct* parallels the contrast between libertarianism and determinism that was common in the Calvinistic circles in which Dewey was reared. At the same time, Shook highlights that Dewey's solution to this problem relies upon his exploitation of the Hegelian idea of self-realization, once due attention is paid to the fact that, as a consequence of his insistence on the idea of natural and social environment, Dewey's mature concept of self-realization is much more naturalistically oriented than his early version of the same notion. Even more evident is Hegel's influence on Dewey's theory of religious experience as formulated in *A Common Faith*. As Shook incisively remarks, "Dewey's theory of the divine represents a pragmatic development of the Hegelian organic metaphysics that he had sought early in his career" (31).

In addition, Shook's work has far-reaching methodological implications. Indeed, leaving aside the specific results obtained, it is worth noting from a historiographical point of view that in this contribution a description is provided of the "emotional reasons" that guided Dewey to his views on religion, democracy, and morality. By doing so, Shook supplies a new additional perspective that puts into sharper focus the significance of Dewey's creative assimilation of influences from his intellectual environment, such as, to name only the most important ones, James' biological psychology and Santayana's idealistic naturalism.

In conclusion, Shook and Good's reconstruction of Dewey's intellectual development, and their provocative account of his later humanistic naturalism, shake the traditional image of Dewey's philosophy to its very foundations. Indeed, the ultimate aim of their work consists in putting Dewey scholarship on new, sounder footing characterized by a rigorous investigation of the different sources of Dewey's thought and an approach more sensitive to its historical conditioning. It is not rash to say that the concrete results obtained in the present book show that this goal has been achieved in the main. What remains to be done is – at least in my opinion – to cast some legitimate doubt on the *historiographical* validity of the autobiographical article *From Absolutism to Experimentalism*, which both Shook and Good seem to use as an unproblematic source of information about Dewey's life and career. It is undoubtedly true, as Shook has pointed out in *Dewey's Empirical Theory of Knowledge and Reality*<sup>7</sup>, that Dewey's sketchy description of his years of philosophical apprenticeship as a long drifting away from Hegelianism has been an important factor in determining the abandonment of the traditional image revolving around the conviction that Dewey's philosophy experienced a sudden, sharp, and quite inexplicable reversal somewhere between 1893 and 1896. However, since the traditional image does not hold us captive any-

---

<sup>7</sup> J. Shook, *Dewey's Empirical Theory of Knowledge and Reality*, 12.

more, it is possible to proceed further, and criticize a tool that has been very useful, but may now turn into a stumbling block for future research. Obviously, this does not amount to saying that the autobiographical reconstruction that Dewey outlined in *From Absolutism to Experimentalism* is false. What I am suggesting is, rather, that Deweyan scholars should be more sensitive to the context in which Dewey wrote that article, and pay more attention to the goal that he was trying to reach. Originally published in a volume entitled *Contemporary American Philosophy* (1930), *From Absolutism to Experimentalism* is a militant article, in which Dewey wants less to offer a faithful account of his personal philosophical development than to put forward an interpretation of the American tradition, and of his own place within it. Dewey's autobiographical sketch is vague, in the sense of being general enough to be minimally faithful to the real historical circumstances, and, at the very same time, plastic enough to be functional to the creation of a narrative able to contrast, on a rhetorical level, the widespread diffusion of epistemology in North America during the 1920's. Once the problems stemming from Dewey's autobiographical remarks are put aside – such as, to name only the most notable ones, the confusing vagueness of the label Hegelianism, the perplexing declaration that “no very fundamental vital influence” issued from books, his questionable assertion that James' *Principles of Psychology* has dramatically influenced his thought –, it should be easier to understand more clearly some controversial aspects of his philosophical development. In my opinion, two lines of research are particularly interesting and promising. On the one hand, a rigorous analysis of the way in which Dewey read James' *Principles of Psychology*, in the light of his knowledge of state-of-the-art psychology and biology of the time; on the other hand, an inquiry into Dewey's place in the pragmatist tradition. The issues dealt with in the present book – that is, Dewey's assimilation of Hegel's idealism in general, and his philosophy of spirit in particular – play a pivotal role in both these histories.