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Book review: Richard Pring John Dewey: A Philosopher of Education for ourTime? Continuum, London, 2007. 190 pp. ISBN 978 0826 48403 1, £75 or \$144 (hbk)

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critique. Finally, it is not clear how his constitutional analysis meshes with his educational analysis: when telling us what the schools are to do, when is he arguing from a legal perspective and when from an education perspective?

CONCLUSION

Does God belong in public schools? Greenawalt answers: 'Yes, but only in some respects' (p. 186). He would also answer: 'More than God is in public schools today.' However, while his answers to this question are reasonable and fairly clear, his reasons for coming to these answers are somewhat muddled. Greenawalt seems to be saying that the principles found in the legal precedent do not provide sufficient guidance to answer many of the tough questions. While he does provide answers to a lot of the tough questions he raises, it is unclear what principles he relies on in coming to his answers. Of course, it is not easy to bring together the frameworks of two academic fields and Greenawalt deserves credit for integrating the legal and educational perspectives into one discussion. However, bringing together these perspectives, along with discussing the particular debates surrounding public schools and religion, calls for a clearer and much more extensive analysis than Greenawalt provides here.

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Richard Pring *John Dewey: A Philosopher of Education for our Time?* Continuum, London, 2007. 190 pp. ISBN 978-0826-48403-1, £75 or \$144 (hbk)

One of the distinguishing features of a thinker who comes to be regarded as being among the greats is that his ideas reflect and refine, in equal measure, prevailing ideas of his time. Hence the need to distinguish between, for instance, Kant and Kantianism, Hegel and Hegelianism, and Plato and Platonism. The first is what the author in question actually thought and wrote. The other, typically, is what interpreters with their own axes to grind *would like* the author to have thought and written, the reflection without the refinement. This is why major thinkers are such easy victims of the charge of guilt by association. So, according to this kind of inference, Rawls's (or Aristotle's or Marx's) theory can be safely dismissed because of its affinity to liberalism (or virtue ethics or communism) and, as everyone should know, liberalism (or virtue ethics or communism) is nonsense. Such was the fate of that peerless giant of American philosophy of education, John Dewey, whose identification with educational progressivism became so thorough that

when its influence waned so did the authority of Dewey's oeuvre. Another point of resistance to Dewey has been his idealism-inspired pragmatist epistemology, upon which such key Deweyan educational ideas as 'experimentalism', 'growth' as the aim of education, and 'the project method' are solidly built. Classical analytic epistemology of Bertrand Russell and G.E. Moore was a direct response to perceived inadequacy of British Idealism and would have no truck with pragmatism's proposal to substitute inquiry for truth as the fundamental concept in the theory of knowledge. Basic to the concerns of Richard Pring's valuable and engaging survey of Dewey's educational theory is to portray his pragmatism in a sympathetic light and to challenge the philosopher's reputation as a leading advocate of child-centredness in education. By removing these impediments to a fair hearing of Dewey, Pring sets the stage for his own argument that Dewey's system of thought provides us with a compelling critical prise on some of today's most salient educational issues: state schooling as an instrument of community cohesion, learning to learn as a core objective of formal instruction, educational evaluation construed narrowly in terms of learners' performance on standardized tests, the increasing deprofessionalization of teaching and centralization of curriculum planning, and the relevance to young people's lives of what they are taught in school.

Dewey himself strenuously rejected the label, it is well known, but whether or not Dewey was a progressive educationalist depends, of course, on what one means by 'educationally progressive'. What Pring regards as being definitive of the progressive outlook is the belief that '*relevance* to the interests and needs of the learner [is] central to education, not an element added by the good teacher to motivate the pupil to learn [subject matter] which had no intrinsic interest for him or her' (p. 35). Taken in this sense, the notion of pupils' 'interests and needs' is susceptible, Pring says, to two interpretations corresponding with two broad 'progressive' movements in education that Dewey explicitly addresses in his writings. The first form of progressivism, bequeathed to us by Herbert Spencer and other nineteenth-century social Darwinists, regarded the dominance of the Latin and Greek classics in the curriculum as obsolete in an age of science. Known today as the 'human capital' or 'industrial psychology' approach to defining high-level aims in education, this form of progressivism claims that an education system that serves both young people and society best is one that equips learners with the skills they will need to take up their proper place in a modern economy. According to the second 'progressive' approach to conceiving educational aims, education should indeed prepare children for future employment but it must also respect their present needs as children: to be looked after by caring and responsible adults, to be taught meaningful, useful things in a way that is comprehensible to them, and to learn and work in an appropriate and stimulating material and social environment. At heart

concerned most with day-to-day classroom teaching and socialization rather than large-scale social planning, this is 'child-centredness', progressivism as it is generally understood today.

But as Pring himself seems to grant, Dewey did not reject progressivism, understood in either of these senses, as much as he saw 'child-centred' progressivism as correcting the deficiencies of 'human-capital' progressivism. His own ideas about 'experimentalism' were, in turn, intended as refinements of child-centredness. For Dewey, the excesses of child-centredness, Pring explains, lie in its superficial interpretation of what it means to take children's interests as the starting point of education. Crudely stated, child-centred progressivism considers that the educational value of a theme or activity in which a child expresses interest derives solely from the mere fact that it holds a child's interest. And so, if Clara seems interested in cats, football or Dora the Explorer then that is what it would be right for Clara to learn about today. Dewey thought that this view fails to appreciate that such punctual interests are manifestations of fundamental, universal human tendencies: to relate to others and understand oneself, to find out and inquire about how things work, to make and create, and to express oneself. Each of these areas of human interest has unlimited possibilities for growth and it is proper to the teacher to identify these interests in children and support, develop and direct their growth in these general areas. By contrast, and like all the foundational post-Enlightenment European progressive education-ists, Dewey had nothing good to say about verbalism, dismissed out of hand the notion that childhood impulses and interests are morally corrupt, and insisted that the curricular justification of material and activities derives from them having some plausible relation to preparing young people for the lives that they will actually lead in this world. It is a trap to insist, with Pring, that Dewey is not a progressive, not just because it misleadingly runs afoul of an historically faithful rendering of the traditionalist-progressivist distinction. More importantly, it is counter-productive because it encourages precisely the kind of dichotomous thinking about progressivism which, Dewey never tires of reminding his readers, is methodologically corrupt. The William Tyndale School, Summerhill, 'child-centred learning' and other widely discredited endeavours may have harmed progressivism's credibility. Yet progressivism has also had an undoubtedly positive influence on the way schools and classrooms are run – if nothing else, teachers, on the whole, are kind to pupils, and corporal punishment, in most countries, is banned. Indeed, the very educational reforms that activist governments in England and the USA have successfully prosecuted in recent years roll back progressivist policy achievements. A small wonder, then, is Pring's conclusion that Dewey would have been opposed to them.

Yet there is another sense in which Dewey significantly breaks from post-Enlightenment educational progressivism or, perhaps more accurately, goes

down the same developmental road as his Swiss contemporary Jean Piaget. The belief that Darwinism revolutionized the theory of knowledge is intaglioed no less on Piaget's epistemology than on Dewey's. 'Education as growth' and 'experimentalism', as Pring adeptly explains, cannot be fully comprehended in abstraction from the fundamentally Darwinian insight that the impulse to represent, know and understand is a trait that the human organism has evolved as a means of adapting to its environment. 'Growth', in Dewey's sense, is the ongoing accumulation by the organism of knowledge and skills that enable it to better deal with problems of adaptation. 'Experience' is essential to growth because it is through 'experience' – i.e. by attempting to solve problems of adaptation – that the organism grows. There arises a need for formal education when a human community amasses a repository of knowledge and skill that is distilled, organized and retained by a community for the purpose of effectively confronting adaptive challenges. The teacher's role is to act as a mediator between learners and this corpus, 'the accumulated wisdom of the race' as Dewey sometimes refers to it, by selecting from it that which is relevant to the adaptive agendas of their lives. To put it bluntly, Dewey is almost exclusively interested in what psychologists today study under the heading of cognitive development, an observation which goes a long way towards explaining Dewey's hostility to children's imaginary pursuits. It also explains Dewey's impatience with that wing of progressivism, best represented by Rousseau and Froebel, that interprets growth in education as the nurtured unfolding of the child's unique, authentic, naturally-given inner self. If any central point in Dewey stands in need of vindication it is here – and not Dewey's association with idealist epistemology – but Pring misses this blind-spot that pragmatism imposes on Dewey's educational theory.

It may have been Pring's mistake to allow Dewey's traditional opponents to dictate his book's agenda, but this detracts little from its qualities as a sympathetic, accessible analysis of Dewey's complex educational theory. Its greatest success is in bringing the lens of Dewey's philosophy to current educational problems. Through Pring's studied lens we see two images clearly: the piteous one of a society that neither respects nor even particularly likes children and a hopeful one of a pair of educational philosophers, Pring and Dewey, who do.

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