Neoliberalism and the ‘Religious’ Work of Schools: The Teacher as Prophet in Dewey’s Democratic Society

Dissertation

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Abstract

This study explores the deleterious and often dehumanizing effects of neoliberal conceptions of schooling on broader democratic forms of education as John Dewey conceived them. I reveal how Dewey’s notion of the religious and his enigmatic claim that the teacher is a “prophet of the true God” provides a way to think differently about the aims and purposes of education situated now within the riverbeds of twenty-first century neoliberalism. With a renewed vision of education, I position teachers as the prophets of democracy who work to subvert the culture of neoliberal schooling.
Dedication

To my wife Mindy, the greatest teacher of love, grace, and honesty.

And…

to all of my prophetic teachers who continue to ‘disturb’ me.
Vita

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Publications


Field of Study

Major Field: Education: Educational Policy and Leadership
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Schooling and education have always been embattled spaces. The history of educational thought and practice within the United States is the history of contention and struggle around broad philosophical questions that concern the aims and purposes of education, who gets educated, and what counts as educational knowledge. These and others questions have been in the groundwater of educational thought since societies began and continue to source the educational streams of today. The tensions around these sources, the push and pull of social change, the influence of religion, industrial and technological revolutions, wars, and globalizations, continue to carve the landscape into which the streams of education flow.

At the dawn of the 20th century, in the midst of the industrial revolution eased by laisse fare economic liberalism, John Dewey raised questions and concerns about the marketization of individuals and the effects of industrialization on how we think about the purposes of education within a democratic society. The reemergence of a radicalized economic liberalism in the early 1980s, now referred to as neo-liberalism, has found fertile soil within the context of a globalized marketplace. Although philosophically and ideologically related to its predecessor, Neoliberalism has played out in the extreme with pervasive and deleterious effects on the potential for democratic ways of living in our world and has profoundly influenced educational
thought and policy. Some of the questions that emerge from this milieu include: How is Neoliberalism unique in the late 20th and early 21st century? If neoliberal thinking is so pervasive, how has it formed our ways of thinking and more specifically, how has it affected our view of education in the context of our global economy? How has the discourse of Neoliberalism shaped the conceptual metaphors we use in conceiving the aims and purposes of education? Considering the deep intertwining of religion and education in the United States, what might be a ‘religious’ alternative to the problem of neoliberal education? If indeed there are alternative ways to think, how might Dewey’s worries in his time be prescient for ours? And what can Dewey’s concerns teach us about education and democracy in the 21st century?

The general focus of this study is just that, to explore the deleterious and often dehumanizing effects of neoliberal conceptions on broader democratic forms of education as Dewey conceived them. Yet, more specifically, I want to reveal how Dewey’s notion of the religious and his enigmatic claim that the teacher is a “prophet of the true God” might help us think differently about the aims and purposes of education situated now within the riverbeds of twenty-first century neoliberalism. With a renewed vision of education, I want to position teachers as the prophets of democracy who work to subvert the culture of neoliberal schooling. If neoliberalism has hollowed out the landscape of education such that its streams run thick with silt, prophetic teachers call for dredging. While dredging, prophetic teachers work to restore the eroded hillsides; they plant new trees. And where there are deserts,
prophetic teachers tap into alternative streams that over time can bring hope and new life to the cut and dried, do or die world of neoliberal schooling.

**The Problem of Neoliberalism in Education**

The first chapter of this study will explore and identify Neoliberalism as a problem for education. The concept of Neoliberalism is itself a notoriously ‘slippery’ idea, making it mind-bendingly difficult to pin down. This difficulty is compounded as one sets out to draw conclusions concerning the nature and substance of the influence of “neoliberal thinking” on educational philosophy broadly, and narrowly for education policy and schooling within the United States. To identify Neoliberalism as a ‘problem’ is to claim that there is an imbalance tilting education toward one extreme. The recent history of neoliberal policies that continue to be enacted on educational systems seem to have strong bipartisan allegiance and indeed have become pervasive. The broad characteristics of Neoliberalism such as unfettered free-market thinking, radical individualism, and privatization have become the very common sense of schooling with implications for epistemology and education policy, for teacher education, and for everyday life in classrooms. The negative effects of neoliberal logic include a reduction in the scope of knowledge and understanding that is primarily focused on the needs of business. Broad policy efforts to prepare globally competitive workers tend to narrow the complexity of learning to simplistic ‘need to know’ formulas and the ‘transfer’ of information from teacher to student. The external development of content becomes the ‘curriculum’ within amplified accountability structures based on performance on high stakes competitive testing. Standardized
national content reinforces traditional teaching models of transfer while dismantling the need for deliberative models of critical thinking and questioning so necessary for civic participation in a liberal democracy. Neoliberal educational logic feeds an intemperate support of the value of market economics over questions of moral value and the good.

These neoliberal conditions have a profoundly dehumanizing effect on the people within schools. I recognize that dehumanization is nothing new on the educational scene. Mass public schooling has always been criticized for its institutionalizing, conforming, and mechanistic effects as well as its general maintenance of racial and class societal divisions. Though there is a tendency to make neoliberalism the ‘poison in the stream’ contaminating the ‘pure waters’ of education, to be sure there is no such thing as educational purity; there is no ‘golden age’ of schooling which can be returned to or obtained if only neoliberalism were filtered out. That being said, it will be clear to the reader that neoliberalism has cut a deep trough in the educational landscape over the past several decades, pushing schooling further toward its dehumanizing tendencies.

Neoliberalism, which came to prominence in the 1980s, is a reformulation of the economic theories of Classical liberalism which stressed a free-market, ‘hands-off’ approach to state interference. Where Classical liberalism conceived that the market forces of competition, if relieved of government regulations, would naturally bring balance and growth to the economy, Neoliberalism radicalizes the notion of the free-market. In Neoliberalism the role of the state is conceived (even on a global scale) as
an enabler of the economy, actively working to enhance market forces in existing markets and formulating markets where none previously existed. Further, in its role to enhance and create markets, the state enacts policies that function punitively for those that do not succeed in facilitating market progress. Kenneth Saltman recognizes that:

…neoliberalism demands privatization of public goods and services, removal of regulation on trade, loosening of capital and labor controls by the state, and the allowance of foreign direct investment. For neoliberalism, public control over public resources should be taken from the ‘necessarily bureaucratic’ state and placed with the ‘necessarily efficient’ private sector.¹

Educational policies conditioned by these neoliberal demands shape schooling in ways that weaken its function as a public good, seen merely as a tool to meet the needs of the private market, and restrict more democratic forms of education.

Neoliberal practices that separate public schools from their democratic roots are seen, most notably perhaps, in the work of John Chubb and Terry Moe. In their book Politics, Markets, and America’s Schools they argue that schools are most effective when they are provided the widest degree of autonomy in their structure and curriculum. This autonomy, they argue, is best achieved not by democratic control and governmental bureaucracy but by market systems that empower educational consumers. The shift from publically controlled schools to schools governed by market forces, they argue, will produce more educationally effective schools. They claim that:

¹ Saltman, “Schooling in Disaster Capitalism,” 144.
Under a system of democratic control, the public schools are governed by an enormous, far-flung constituency in which the interests of parents and students carry no special status or weight. When markets prevail, parents and students are thrust onto center stage, along with the owners and staff of schools; most of the rest of society plays a distinctly secondary role, limited for the most part to setting the framework within which educational choices get made.2

Parents and students are “thrust onto center stage”, but instead of enabling them to take the role of citizens who communicate and cooperate to collectively govern, the market stage constructs their role as that of consumers who compete for goods and services provided by business models. Practices such as chartering, vouchers, and contracting are applications of market-based thinking that drain governance and resources away from community control and place them in the hands of private business. Saltman warns that “privatizing public schools does not simply threaten to skim public tax money to provide rich investors with profit. Public schools differ from privately-controlled schools in that they harbor a distinct potential for public deliberation and oversight that privately owned and controlled educational institutions limit.” 3

Neoliberalism conceives that problems of educational inequalities, on a broad scale from learning to funding, can be resolved by the natural mechanisms of the market, not by improving deficiencies in the democratic processes. This is key to understanding the neoliberal perspective. When deliberative democratic processes seem ‘ineffective’; responding slowly to market forces, expressing a concern for consensus building, or tending toward a constructivist orientation, neoliberalism loses

2 Chubb, Politics, Markets, and America’s Schools, 35.
3 Saltman, “Schooling in Disaster Capitalism,” 133.
patience and ‘the market’ is called in to save the day. Indeed, the values of the market override and critically undermine democratic values. As democratic forms of life wither, the market, in the neoliberal conception, becomes the social and economic cure-all.

In neoliberal market forms of schooling not only is the public separated from and limited in its democratic role but the aim of education itself, instead of preparing democratic citizens, becomes the creation of workers and consumers who are economically fit. Nel Noddings laments that, “today’s reformers say little about forms of personal well-being that are aimed at neither the country’s nor the individual’s economic status.” ⁴ There seems to be bi-partisan political support for neoliberal values that treat “public schooling as primarily workforce and consumer preparation rather than as primarily a public good dedicated to preparing citizens for collective self-governance.”⁵ This is surely a reduction of the broad liberal aims of education which engender the values of dialogue and critical thinking that living in complex societies demands. Narrow constructions of education for the purposes of preparing workers and consumers place the scope of learning in an ever inward spiral. Thinking skills and personal competencies that cannot be quantified and measured for market use are increasingly marginalized limiting the potential of those same qualities to be used as a corrective force. Indeed, how we judge the ‘effectiveness’ of learning in a market-based system requires the construction of an apparatus of accountability

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⁴ Noddings, *Happiness and Education*, 81.
structures where learning is quantified, standardized and tested. “Real learning, says Pauline Lipman, “involves investigation, dialogue, and examination of multiple perspectives.”

The narrowing of the educational endeavor toward the goal of one ‘correct’ answer on a high-stakes tests drives curriculum development toward externally designed standardization and essentially prohibits the need for critical reflection and dialogical learning. Neoliberal conceptions of schooling with their imposition of market forces work to separate the public from its engagement with structures that form the basis of democratic participation. And by narrowing the conception of the learner to worker and consumer, Neoliberalism limits the ability of those learners to engage in the process in the first place.

This chapter will survey the background of Neoliberalism and expose the underlying concepts which led to its rise to prominence through the 1980s and 1990s. I will then distill some of its basic tenets and show how it has shaped the discourse and implementation of recent educational reform policies. The parameters of this discussion will expose ways in which neoliberal thinking disengages the public from their democratic role in education and how the tough cut by neoliberal conceptions have confined the aims of education to the preparation of workers and consumers in the marketplace. With educational aims that are increasingly bent toward market interests set within an accountability regime of prepackaged curriculum and standardized testing, the scope of knowledge, what is knowable and how it is

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6 Monahan and Torres, *Schools under Surveillance*, 163.
knowable, is formalized and formulized into what can only be measured by statistics and quantification. Classroom teachers, in order to meet the demands of raising test scores within these market aims, are pressured to sacrifice their own skill and professional insight and ‘teach to the test’. I will present evidence that will show how the market aims of education and the narrowing of the curriculum serve to support one another in a contracting spiral that limits the need for critical thinking, dialogue, and ethical deliberation necessary for the development of vital democratic forms of schooling.

**Religion in Schools as a Solution**

Chapter two of this study will take up the historic conversation surrounding the place of religion in public schools. The roots of American education began in the Protestant Christian religion as the quest to teach the young and preserve the faith. To the extent that American culture has maintained the vestiges of its Protestant upbringings, schooling continues to be a space where religion finds a voice. If schooling and education in general have been conceived in terms of their ability to solve social and economic problems within society, then Protestantism in particular finds a suitable partner in its work of redemption. This chapter will examine the place of religion in public schools as a solution to the problem of neoliberal schooling.

The relationship between religion and American public schools is intertwined, contentious, and set within the wider struggle for religious freedom. By the work of accident, compromise, and second choices the framers of the new constitution devised
a uniquely American solution to the problem of religious freedom that would separate
religion from its historic marriage with government apparatus. Considering the
available state supported denominational options already in place, and without a
majority consensus, James Fraser surmises that the framers had little choice for their
design for federal intervention. “During the debates surrounding the adoption of the
Constitution and the Bill of Rights, there was almost no opposition to the radical
disestablishment included in the final documents.”7 The separation of religion from
the work of the government placed the work of education in a problematic position.
Though there was agreement in the new republic that religion should play a role in the
formation of a good citizenry, the question of whose religion should prevail was a
matter of debate. The task of education for much of European history had been given
to a church established by the state. Where the purposes of the church (or a church) are
established and supported by the ruling government there is no misalignment with
church and state educational purposes. But the separation of church and state brought
new questions to the role of education within a country that refused to establish an
official religion in particular. The question of how to bring unity out of plurality, to
‘form a more perfect union’ was the question for the framers of the Constitution and
for those who would think about the role of education in such a union.

In this chapter I will explore the history of the relationship between religion
and American public schools. I will evaluate the proposal that a more robust presence

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7 Fraser, Between Church and State, 13.
for religion in schools will broaden the narrowed focus of education under the neoliberal hegemony. I will engage specifically with the work of Warren Nord and contend that his solution is ultimately unhelpful under the conditions of neoliberal schooling practices as they currently stand. In the overwhelming cacophony of neoliberal education policies Ward’s proposal gives little recognition of education as an act of politics and ignores the historic and continuing cultural dominance of Christianity in America. Suzanne Rosenblith reveals in her study of Georgia bible bills that “while public schools across the country are slowly becoming more open to the idea of more religion, the sort of religion and the type of religious education being served up should give those invested in preserving liberal educational ideals pause for concern.”

Cathy Byrne, writing in the largely Christian context of Australia, recognizes that “the uncritical nature of some interfaith education initiatives encourages the continuation of cultural and theological bias.” I worry that the application of Ward’s proposal in the current climate of allegiance between neoliberal and conservative Christian thought will not only go unquestioned but serve to support dominant voices while continuing to silence those who have the least power. I will show that the work of Nel Noddings provides a broader more integrated approach that gives insight into ways of including existential questions within the school curriculum. Noddings’ “big questions”, though offering some initial vision for “life-oriented” education, however, does not go far enough in an effort to dismantle neoliberal

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8 Rosenblith, “Educating for Autonomy and Respect or Educating for Christianity?” 10.
9 Byrne, “Freirean Critical Pedagogy’s Challenge to Interfaith Education,” 47.
10 Noddings, Educating for Intelligent Belief or Unbelief, 15.
practices in schools. Her ideas will provide perspective as I look to John Dewey for guidance on the ‘religious’ work of schools and his understanding of education as transformative\(^{11}\) of experience toward intelligent action\(^{12}\) in the world; the joining of theory and practice.

**John Dewy and the ‘Religious’ Work of Schools**

Chapter Three will focus on John Dewey’s understanding of the religious and its function within a democratic society and public schooling. In my efforts to ‘converse’ with Dewey and his notions of religion and democracy and education I have come to doubt that the knowledge of religions can stave off the effects of Neoliberalism. Religious education has its own purposes and its purpose within the public school indeed may function as part of a multicultural concern to educate for global citizenship. The inclusion of the study of religions may be part of what is required of a liberal education. For some who look on the loss of Protestant ‘control’ of the schools it may serve as a way to reassert the ‘superior truth’ of American Protestant Christianity. However, the inclusion of the study about religions within the public school overlooks the root upon which Neoliberalism is hacking. Neoliberal practices have so shaped the current educational landscape toward the breakdown of democratic educational aims that a more nuanced approach toward Dewey’s “associated way of living” is required. Certainly having more knowledge of religions

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\(^{11}\) Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 59.

\(^{12}\) Ibid., 117–29.
would contribute to Dewey’s way of living in community. But in Dewey’s notion of
the religious work of schools, the erosion of democracy is its greatest religious threat.
For Dewey, schools become more religious as they become more democratic. Unless
schools work to protect and promote democratic ways against Neoliberalism, the
inclusion of religion as a subject of study may become just another tool in the global
economic preparation game, subject to standardization, quantification, and
measurement for achievement status, if it survives the cut at all. If schools, shaped by
neoliberal practices, are limited in their abilities to prepare democratic citizens, then
arguments for or against the inclusion of the study of religion in public education are
simply moot.

Dewey’s thought provides another way to claim the role of schools in bringing
together a diverse society. Dewey claims that the schools in their social function to
unite society are simultaneously living out a religious function. Dewey writes in 1908
in Religion and Our Schools: “Our schools, in bringing together those of different
nationalities, languages, traditions, and creeds, in assimilating them together upon the
basis of what is common and public in endeavor and achievement, are performing an
infinitely significant religious work. They are promoting the social unit out of which
in the end genuine religious unity must grow. 13 The function of the school “as the
primary and most effective instrument of social progress and reform” 14 is, from
Dewey’s understanding, a religious function.

It is important to understand that Dewey’s notion of the religious is concerned with its function. This religious function of the school must be conceived within Dewey’s understanding of the difference between religion and religious. To make this distinction, Dewey marks religion as “a special body of beliefs and practices having some kind of institutional organization.” The theological creeds and liturgical practices of a specific faith group would constitute a religion. His sense of the religious does not have a necessary connection to any specific body of beliefs, practices, or institutions that would tend to vie for supremacy and therefore continue to divide the schools. The religious refers to the quality of an experience, how an experience functions as opposed to being dependent upon a particular sectarian teaching. Dewey says that:

if this function were rescued through emancipation from dependence upon those elements that constitute a religion, many individuals would find that experiences having the force of bringing about a better, deeper and enduring adjustment in life…occur frequently in connecting with many significant moments of living.

This is the essence of what Dewey conceives of as religious, the “attitudes that lend deep and enduring support to the process of living.” His vision of religious faith is faith not in the revelation of truths from a supreme being that stands outside the natural world, not faith in codified doctrines of moral truth established by sectarian

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16 Ibid., 14 (emphasis added).
17 Ibid., 15.
religions groups. Religious faith for Dewey is faith in the human relational condition. “Faith in the continued disclosing of truth through directed cooperative human endeavor is more religious in quality than is any faith in a completed revelation.”

Dewey maintains that we come to better world not because we come to the table and boil down our doctrines to what is common. Dewey has faith that in the process of coming together to communicate and struggle in associated living, we work toward a dynamic ideal. This is for Dewey the essence of democracy. Dewey was clear to exclude an ultimate source for a common ethic. Whereas theism finds this source in God as a separate being, Dewey finds the source in the relational interactions between humans and their environment, a “natural piety” that finds its expression and formation in the school’s educative work of social unity. Dewey calls this social unifying work of the schools “religious work”.

**The Teacher as Prophet**

Chapter Four of this study will explore Dewey’s enigmatic claim that the teacher is a “prophet of the true God and the usherer in of the true kingdom of God.” Nowhere in John Dewey’s works on education is there serious contention with the concept of God. In Dewey’s major work, *Democracy and Education*, he mentions God on just three occasions; once in a quote from Emerson, another in reference to Rousseau, and the third concerning medieval tradition. Yet to claim that Dewey’s vision of education and democratic society is purely secular in its application is to

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18 Ibid., 26.
misunderstand Dewey. Indeed, Dewey rejected the dualisms inherent in bifurcations of the world into realms of the secular and the religious. If Dewey envisioned a democratic society of cooperative human effort, one integrated with a strong sense of this-worldliness, requiring education, is this ‘prophet of God’ language a curious aberration, acquiescence to audience expectations, or does it reflect a core position within Dewey’s broader perspective? In other words, how do we read this ‘confession’ within Dewey’s understanding of education and the work of the teacher? What did he mean when he claimed the role of the teacher as the “prophet of the true God and the usherer in of the true kingdom of God”? 19 In this study, I will show how this statement fits within Dewey’s broader understanding of the function of the religious and reveal that his concepts of God and the kingdom of God are intimately intertwined with his human relational understanding of a democratic society. And for Dewey, the best hope for humanity to learn how to live and work toward “associated living” are the in schools where the teachers live up to their high calling as prophets.

The Prophetic Work of the Teacher

Chapter Five will set out the task of the Deweyan prophetic teacher within neoliberal schooling. Dewey’s prophetic teacher will have broad implications for the role of teaching conceived within the neoliberal imagination. I will re-envision the role and task of teaching with inspiration from Dewey’s ‘high calling’. In addition to the degradation and deskillling of teachers as professionals, Neoliberalism ignores the

role of teacher as moral agent and shapes teachers as managers, trainers, and technicians of curriculum. The traditional role of the prophet functions within a context of injustice to unveil the inhumane practices of hegemonic power on one hand and offer imaginative hope for the future on the other. The undemocratic and unjust practices of neoliberal schooling are in stark contrast to Dewey’s educational vision, a vision that calls for the rise of the prophet teacher. I will explore the specific ramifications of Dewey’s vision of the teacher as a prophet and how this prophet teacher might function to dismantle the hegemonic practices of Neoliberalism.
Chapter 1: The Problem of Neoliberalism in Education

The trench of neoliberalism is cut deeply into the landscape of contemporary education. And its radical path is a continuing problem for education. Its methods have been carried on the waves of economic, social, and political dissatisfactions. Its logic sails smoothly on the deep waters of globalization. During waves of prosperity and comfort the issues of schooling and education fade into the background noise of progress. But when the storms of dis-ease emerge it is often the schools that wash up on the shores of ridicule and blame. After all, the “school is one of the few places where policymakers and citizens can aim their discomfort with social and economic changes.”\(^{20}\) Dissatisfactions with schooling can be linked broadly with economic and political dissatisfactions and generally reflect partisan interests. However, recent neoliberal policies enacted on educational systems seem to have little partisan loyalty. The pervasive effects of neoliberal economic policy and its underlying ideological technologies on the educational world, from epistemology to education policy to teacher education to the everyday functions of classroom life, continue to be critically examined. The broad characteristics of Neoliberalism such as unfettered free-market thinking, radicalized individualism, and privatization have become the common sense

\(^{20}\) Harris, Handel, and Mishel, “Education and the Economy Revisited.” P.59
of schooling. The broader cultural crisis, a rupture that Stuart Hall has called, “the long march of the Neo-liberal Revolution,”\textsuperscript{21} has had its way with American schooling, its polity and policy, contorting the very landscape of public educational mentality. Critics of the application of neoliberal logic have identified its negative effects to include: the unquestioned support of capitalism and the deleterious effects of militant consumerism on the individual and society, the erosion of democracy and civic participation, the increase in social injustice, and the tendency to overlook questions of moral value and the good. In this chapter I will survey the background of Neoliberalism, exploring the underlying concepts which led to its prominence through the 1980s and 1990s. I will then distill some of its basic tenets and show how it has shaped the discourse and implementation of recent educational policies.

The background of Neoliberalism is best examined by exploring its roots in Classical Liberalism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. As such, the role of the state as an intervening force is the guiding principle in understanding Neoliberalism as one of the various iterations of liberalism. Classical liberalism along with the Enlightenment movement of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries claimed reason to be the foundation of individual freedom. The rights of individual freedom were ‘inalienable’ and, as John Locke proposed, were independent of governmental authority. Thus the role for government in this sense was limited to the protection of individual rights and freedoms. Classical political liberalism is rooted in the struggle of the merchant and consumer classes that arose during eighteenth-century

\textsuperscript{21} Hall, “The Neo-Liberal Revolution,” 705.
Europe. Monarchal and aristocratic rule was anathema to the inalienable freedoms of Englishmen who required representational government with limited powers. Liberalism has its foundations in the cluster of ideas surrounding the free individual and views the state primarily as having the potential for oppression and even tyranny and thus functions best with limited capacities guaranteeing the rights of the individual. Classical economic liberalism, or what is termed *laissez-faire* or free-market liberalism, proclaimed that the economy functions optimally without heavy-handed governmental interference. “Thus the state is to refrain from interfering with the economic activities of self-interested citizens and instead use its power to guarantee open economic exchange”\(^22\). Christine Sleeter reminds us that classical liberalism is grounded on “individual rights, individual freedoms, and private property, within the rule of law. Liberal political policies generally emphasize opportunity and competition, moderated by protections against discrimination and market excesses, including provision of some level of common welfare.”\(^23\)

Classical liberalism with idea and the trust that the ‘invisible hand’ of market forces would naturally guide and balance economic transactions would prevail in the United States throughout the late nineteenth and into the first quarter of the twentieth century. This trust quickly dissolved in the 1929 crash of the stock market and the proceeding economic depression. The depth and the length of the Great Depression focused many economic thinkers like John Maynard Keynes and Karl Polanyi on

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\(^{23}\) Sleeter, “Equity, Democracy, and Neoliberal Assaults on Teacher Education,” 1947.
recognizing that market forces left to themselves would not provide the kinds of
economic advances and protections that classical liberalism promised. They were
critical of classical liberalism for its “inability to recognize that modern capitalism had
to be subjected to certain regulations and controls by a strong secular state.”

Keynesian economic policy attempted a compromise between the extreme state
interventionism of the socialist state that arose in the USSR and the hands off
approach of classical liberalism. Keynes proposed an economic theory that expanded
the role of government in monetary policy and one that helped to provide public
safeguards against economic decline. “It was Keynesian advocacy of an interventionist
state and regulated markets that gave ‘liberalism’ its modern economic meaning: a
doctrine favoring a large, active government, regulation of industry, high taxes for the
rich, and extensive social welfare programmes for all.”

As an outgrowth of
Keynesian economic policy a host of social reformist programs developed to protect
workers from market volatility. Restrictions were placed on the more speculative
activities of the market along with financial supports in the event of market failure.
The Keynesian economic theories provided support for the Glass-Steagall Act of
1933. The Act separated U.S. banks from investment firms, protecting banks from risk
within the speculative investment side of market finances. A further strengthening of
Keynesian policy in the 1944 Bretton Woods Agreement focused on the cooperative

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25 Ibid., 8–9.
efforts between corporations and government to reduce market volatility and maintain steady economic growth.

Keynesian market ideas, the subsequent New Deal domestic policies of the Roosevelt administration, and later the Great Society programs of Lyndon Johnson, provided considerable economic growth rates including increased wages, low inflation, broad access to material goods and the institution of a network of social protections. Keynesianism became the dominant economic framework roughly from 1945 to 1975.

A shift in conditions born of the economic recession of the mid-1970s brought focus and criticism to Keynesian policy due to “the breakdown of regular exchange rates, the collapse of the profitability of business, and…its inability to maintain full employment.”26 The criticism of Keynesian liberalisms, particularly the increased role of government in economic and social policy under the welfare state, prompted a return to the idea of classical liberalism’s limited role of government. Mark Olssen explains that just as welfare state policies were in the process of being constructed there were various arguments against the protracted role of the state in its political and economic functions. Hayek (1935, 1944, 1945, 1960), Friedman (1962, 1980), Buchanan (1960,1969,1975) and Nozick (1974) argued that forms of state intervention that go beyond the “minimal functions of the defense of the realm and the protection

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of basic rights to life and property are dangerous threats to liberty which are likely to lead down the ‘road to serfdom’.”

The ‘neo’ of Neoliberalism represents this return to economic liberalism. “The economic liberals behind this movement seek to effect a reclamation of the dominance they enjoyed prior to the global crisis of capitalism in the first half the 20th Century.” Many argued that overbearing governmental regulations, excessive spending on social programs, and high tariff barriers to international trade had been responsible for creating conditions that led to high inflation and poor economic growth in the 1970’s. There was the view, particularly from policy makers, that government interference was the main source of the problem and that privileging markets over the state would provide a more balanced approach to economic policy. According to Meg Luxton, Neoliberalism changed the linkage between politics and the economy partially dismantling the Keynesian welfare state. The Neoliberalism that developed was a “revived form of classical liberalism. It critiqued both socialism and the welfare state in one stroke as plagued by the evils of ‘statism’, ‘central planning’, and bureaucratic, collective provision. It scolded statist options and posited non-statist alternatives emphasizing a greater role for freedom and markets.” The unfettered

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27 Ibid., 343–44.
29 Steger, Neoliberalism a Very Short Introduction, 10.
market is conceived, much as in classical liberalism, as the best way to insure individual freedom.

Not only does Neoliberalism revive the free-market notions of classical liberalism, but more it attempts to modify the role of government from a regulating force in the market economy to an enabling force. Classical liberalism conceives of state power in a negative sense where the individual is in need of emancipation from the coercive power of the machinations of the state. On the other hand, neoliberalism conceives the state more positively in the narrowed role of market facilitator, providing laws, institutions, and proper economic conditions for market growth.33 This new form of liberalism, emphasizing free markets and free trade, spread relatively quickly under the conditions of globalization. The idea of the state as enabler of the market became the solution to the economic obstacles for developing countries around the globe. Neoliberal ideas thrived in the early 1980s and would go on to set the world’s economic and political agenda for the next 25 years.34

Perhaps the most revealing aspect in the attempt to understand the neoliberal frame is found in its contradictions. For all of its claims in favor of the free market, it is clear that the raw principles of a truly free market are not desirable in practice. Noam Chomsky calls this contradiction the “really existing free market: market discipline is good for you, but not for me, except for temporary advantage.”35 Bipartisan political support for the systems of international finance capital growth

33 Ibid., 340.
34 Steger, Neoliberalism a Very Short Introduction, 10.
35 Chomsky, Profit Over People, 34.
become the bottom-line goals for the practice of neoliberalism. As discussed earlier, it proposes the low taxes and reduced government regulations of a weak state in order to unbind capital and restrain Keynesian liberalism. Yet in practice, in the “really existing” market, government must act in favor of large corporations. The state becomes a strong coercive partner for international big business while remaining a weak partner for the people.\(^\text{36}\) The most recent financial crisis is a stark example of the neoliberal conception of the “free” market. The highly publicized government bailouts of large corporations “too big to fail” represent a long, yet hidden pattern of corporate subsidies that essentially shield multinational businesses from the rough edges of the market. This “socialism for the rich”\(^\text{37}\) is a misunderstanding of classical liberalism expressed in the writings of Adam Smith who, according to Chomsky, expressed distain for a market system that advantaged the capitalist while dehumanizing the working class. As he sees it, the “leading principles of classical liberalism receive their natural modern expression not in the neoliberal “religion” but in the independent movements of working people and the idea and practices of the libertarian socialist movements, at times articulated also by such major figures of twentieth-century thought as Bertrand Russel and John Dewey.”\(^\text{38}\) The assertion of “free market” liberalism is a distortion that hides in the rhetoric of small government as the condition for the freedom of the individual but rests in strong government protections for the growth of capital.

\(^{36}\) Shoup, \textit{Wall Street’s Think Tank}, 166.  
\(^{38}\) Ibid., 40.
Despite the historical roots of the idea, current usage of the term ‘neoliberalism’ is fraught with a looseness and an imprecision that leads to difficulty in containing the concept to a particular area. Is it primarily an economic policy? Is it a political philosophy? Taylor Boas and Jordan Gans-Morse claim that “neoliberalism has become a conceptual trash heap capable of accommodating multiple distasteful phenomena without much argument as to whether one or the other component really belongs.” In what follows I do not propose to develop a complete typology, but instead I hope to provide some sense of the difficulty in pinning it down and then proceed to a consolidation of its major tenets.

The term Neoliberalism has an optimistic image where the market is depicted as having a positive role in the function of society, and where activity in the marketplace is a social good. The market, under neoliberalism’s gaze is represented as efficient and impartial. In contrast to this, public enterprise is often attacked under the term neoliberalism. Any hint of the red tape of bureaucracy, welfare, unions, or government regulatory agencies is condemned as working against the efficiency of the market. Boas and Gans-Morse, in their extensive literature survey of the current usage of the term contend a negative connotation for the term by recognizing that “virtually no one self-identifies as a neoliberal, even though scholars frequently associate others—politicians, economic advisors, and even fellow academics—

39 Boas and Gans-Morse, “Neoliberalism,” 156.
40 Penetrating Neoliberalism : Changing Relations of Gender, Race, Ability, and Class and ebrary, Inc, Neoliberalism and Everyday Life, 27.
They find that it is most often used pejoratively by those who are critical of the unfettered free market mechanisms which neoliberalism espouses.

Neoliberalism, in this view, is most often criticized as a radical form of the free market whose interests would seek to repel any interference from government or public entities. It is portrayed as a “market fundamentalism that subordinates the art of democratic politics to the rapacious laws of a market economy that expands its reach to include all aspects of social life within the dictates and values of a market-driven society.” In Luxton’s vision of a neoliberal world, truth and virtue exist only in relation to market functionality. Evidence of the value of a product is sustained by its value as a commodity as such. Evidence that the proclamations of political leaders are valid is tested only upon the criteria that they are elected to office. The market indeed determines value.

The term ‘Neoliberalism’ has been used to apply to many areas. For much of this section, I rely on the work of Boas and Gans-Morse. I have, however altered their categories somewhat. I find Neoliberalism as it applies to (1) a set of policies, (2) an economic development model, (3) a mode of governance, and (4) an ideology. Olssen contends that “deliberate policy” properly characterizes neoliberalism instead of some notion of unfettered market mechanisms. He quotes Paul Hurst in saying that “the creation of markets has been engineered by particular policies. It was public
*policy*, not market pressures, which led to the deregulation of capital markets and the removal of exchange controls in the late 1970s and early 1980s".\(^{45}\) Included in Boas and Gans-Morse policy characterizations are those…

that liberalize the economy, by eliminating price controls, deregulating capital markets, and lowering trade barriers; those that reduce the role of the state in the economy, most notably via privatization of state-owned enterprises; and those that contribute to fiscal austerity and macroeconomic stabilization, including tight control of the money supply, elimination of budget deficits, and curtailment of government subsidies.\(^{46}\)

As this list suggests, it would be difficult to identify any isolated policy or group of policies with a neoliberal agenda. But as Luxton notes, it is a “sprawling family” of various programs and policies that take a diversity of forms institutionally and arise in various arrangements.\(^{47}\) The competitive economic pressures of the global marketplace serve as a rich environment for neoliberal doctrine and practice, thus perpetuating the need for ongoing policy implementation.

The coalescing of doctrine, practice and policy into an overarching strategy for development raises Neoliberalism as a model with far reaching economic, political and social ramifications. Instead of merely a collection of policy solutions for isolated economic problems, Neoliberalism as a development model concerns a group of economic theories “linking disparate policies together into a coherent recipe for growth or modernization; prescriptions for the proper role of key actors such as labor

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\(^{45}\) Olssen, “Understanding the Mechanisms of Neoliberal Control,” 217. (emphasis added).

\(^{46}\) Boas and Gans-Morse, “Neoliberalism,” 143.

unions, private enterprise, and the state; and an explicitly political project to carry out these prescriptions and ensure that actors play by the rules of the game.” These development models have been widely applied in the global south and more recently in China as their economic policies have become more open to western trade.

Neoliberalism as a mode of governance is constructed primarily upon those tenets of individual freedom which formed the foundation of classical liberalism. The values of competition, self-interest, and individual empowerment are highlighted in ways that marginalize state power over the individual. These same ‘individual’ values are superimposed upon the notion of the self-regulating free market to become a model for government. In a Foucauldian sense of governmentality, the ‘ways’ of Neoliberalism become the structures of power that organize and shape individual conduct. Steger and Roy contend that this mode of governance “rather than operating along traditional lines of pursuing the public good (rather than profits) by enhancing civil society and social justice, neoliberals call for the employment of government technologies that are taken from the world of business and commerce.” They suggest that in such a matrix, “government workers see themselves no longer as public servants and guardians of a qualitatively defined ‘public good’ but as self-interested actors responsible to the market and contributing to the monetary success of slimmed-down state ‘enterprises.’”

48 Boas and Gans-Morse, “Neoliberalism,” 144.
49 Steger, Neoliberalism a Very Short Introduction, 12.
50 Ibid., 12–13.
As an ideology, Neoliberalism operates well beyond the boundaries of an economic or political system. “Neoliberalism is not simply an economic policy designed to cut government spending, pursue free-trade policies, and free market forces from government regulations; it is also a political philosophy and ideology that affects every dimension of social life.” Its pervasiveness as an ideological perspective is shown in its ability to narrow political perspectives to focus on the efficiency of the market. Neoliberalism emphasizes what Schwarzmantel calls a “common-sense liberalism” that appeals to liberals and conservatives alike.

Those ideologies historically critical of liberalism, like conservatism, have entered on liberal terrain by abandoning or downplaying their own distinctive traditions and by accepting this ‘common sense liberalism’ with its emphasis on the market, competition, freedom of individual choice and the skepticism towards the public sphere. The common sense appeal of Neoliberalism allows its ideological commitments to function broadly within social life with little recognition of optional frameworks.

Out of a plethora of neoliberal claims or tenets (see Appendix A), I advance here a consolidation of three broad tenets which have the most significant relevance to public schools and education policy in general. What follows is therefore not an attempt to be all inclusive, but an effort to provide a brief sketch outlining significant neoliberal tendencies that, as will be shown later, have a shaping effect on the educational world. The three broad claims or tenets include: (1) Value is determined

52 Ibid., 90.
by monetary worth in the market, (2) The disassociated individual is the focus of concern, and (3) Private enterprise is more advantageous than public agency.

Looming large as a first tenet of Neoliberalism is the claim that value is determined by monetary worth within the market. The value of the individual, in essence, is theorized based on the particular role that the individual plays in the market economy. Skills, knowledge and abilities are viewed as resources owned by the individual that can be leveraged in the marketplace. It behooves the individual to take responsibility for their own ‘marketability’ by ‘skilling up’ or planning for ‘continuous improvement’ of the self. Individuals whose worth is theorized as a resource are therefore responsible for their own security in the market, releasing employers from social liabilities.53 Indeed, the collective value of society is theorized in terms of its monetary worth. Measures of the ‘successful’ society are viewed in terms of economic growth and in the language of business. The social climate becomes one dictated by the rules of ‘good business’ rather than democratic deliberation. Wendy Brown claims that:

…as neoliberalism identifies the state with entrepreneurial and managerial functions, and remakes the state on the model of the firm, it facilitates and legitimizes arrogations of power by the state that would be unacceptable to a democratic culture or within a democratic table of values. It replaces strictures on democratic proceduralism and accountability with norms of good management: effectivity or profitability. Indeed, it sets aside legality, accountability, and truthfulness in favor of these criteria.54

In the background of this tenet is the idealized notion of the necessity of perpetual economic growth due to continued global competition.

An overreliance on market logic becomes the essential criteria for making human judgments in the neoliberal world. In contrast to Mill’s conception of the ‘marketplace of ideas’ where the problems of human judgment and societal failures become part of a larger public dialogue, the market logic of Neoliberalism looks for solutions within the confines of the market. This market logic is powered by “neoliberal discourses [that] reorganize consciousness and shape the public conversation by substituting the vocabulary of self-interest and individual responsibility for the collective good and by rearticulating equity to standards and choice in the market.” Brown asserts that as political and social problems become transformed into issues of the market, individual problems evolve into problems with only market solutions. The task of solving problems becomes less an issue for collective public deliberation and becomes focused toward answers provided by ‘products’ available within the market.

The positive outcome of market logic is a purported efficiency brought on by increased standardization and quantification within a competitive free market. In some sense economic discourse has always been about a shifting toward the ‘numbers’, obscuring the very human side of economic policy in favor of ‘hard data’ where the ‘numbers speak for themselves.’ Obscuring of the human side of economic policy is

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55 Monahan and Torres, *Schools under Surveillance*, 160.
intensified in Neoliberalism where ‘everything comes down to the numbers’ and ‘numbers don’t lie’. Human voices, particularly those of the poor and disadvantaged, are marginalized when the logic of the market speaks the loudest. Yet neoliberals claim that markets operating on the principles of supply and demand establish competition as a factor in the provision of public services that can overcome the unresponsiveness and inefficiency of public agencies.  

A second tenet of Neoliberalism claims that the individual is the primary focus of analysis. The conceptual field of liberalism with its value placed upon the individual is invoked here, yet under Neoliberalism the role of the individual is separated from community social structures. The individual of Neoliberalism is extreme.

The individual is held to be asocial and ahistorical. Such a conception also implies a model of society. Freedom from dependence upon others means freedom from relations with others except those relations entered into voluntarily out of self-interest. Human society for the neo-liberal, as for their classical precursors, is simply a series of market relations between self-interested subjects.  

Luxton asserts that the neoliberal individual is denied social structures that help to form values and personal practices. Individual initiative and self-interested competition become the primary role for neoliberal citizens. Instead of being empowered citizens for collective social action neoliberal individuals are drained of

58 Ibid., 349.  
59 Penetrating Neoliberalism: Changing Relations of Gender, Race, Ability, and Class and ebrary, Inc, Neoliberalism and Everyday Life, 175.
this collective sense, isolated and rendered helpless to enact social change. To be a
good citizen in a neoliberal world is to be a good consumer in the marketplace. Steven
Ward says it well. “Under neoliberalism people were to be reconceptualized less as
socially connected citizens of a nation state or morally situated members of a culture
and more as self-interested competitors, self-actualized entrepreneurs and rational
consumers in a dynamic and ever-changing global marketplace.”60 In order to survive,
the individual must take on the initiative in an environment that renders the social
relationships invisible. The individual becomes competitive with all others in a
Darwinian test of will and survival.

Implicit in this matrix of neoliberal individualism is the assumption of a
rational economic actor. As self-actualized individuals, the market assumes that these
individuals can successfully compete in consumer activities and make rational choices.
Indeed, it “figures citizens exhaustively as rational economic actors in every sphere of
life.”61 Brown calls this assumption into question by linking the creation of
entrepreneurial citizenry with increased governance and administrative control. “The
choosing subject and the governed subject are far from opposites; indeed, individual
rational action on one side and state or religious authority on the other, while operating
in different semiotic registers, are quite compatible.”62 This choosing subject is over
responsiblized and, again, further isolated from the safety of social constraints and
social obligations. Choices are made within the marketplace and the responsibility for

60 Ward, Neoliberalism and the Global Restructuring of Knowledge and Education, 2.
62 Ibid., 705.
those choices are assumed solely by the choosing individual. “For neoliberals, those who do not succeed are held to have made bad choices. Personal responsibility means nothing is society's fault. People have only themselves to blame.” People are empowered to make different choices; however, their choices are limited to individual transactions within a marketplace of possibilities. The marketplace ‘decides’ what is possible based on the choices made available. Choices outside the market are made invisible to the consumer. Collective action that might open possibilities outside the consumer marketplace remain unimaginable where this radical individual is so constructed.

A necessity and even perhaps a contingency of such radicalized individualism (identified particularly by critics) is the decontextualization of political, economic and social life. Self-interested competitors in the free market are best operationalized in a context where the justifications for and the ramifications of consumer choices are obscured. The transformation of the solutions to problems of political, economic and social life into commodities within a market reduces social cohesion and further removes the issues from their inherent context. Making decisions about these problems becomes a matter for personal deliberation. Brown contends that, what she calls “depoliticization”, is “unprecedented” in scope due to the rationality of Neoliberalism’s framing discourse. It is best, for proper functionality of the market, that not only are choices outside the market made invisible but that the choices which

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are available be isolated from their consequences. This isolation of choices from consequences further serves to blame the consumer for making bad choices when negative consequences develop. Social costs and benefits are hidden for view while individual market power is idolized as the key to economic success on a global scale.

A third tenet of Neoliberalism is the privatization of the public sphere. Once public provisions become a matter for the private consumer, economic power and the control of various public and social services from welfare to education, from prisons to the military are necessarily transferred to private agencies providing consumer choice. This is fed by Neoliberalism’s strong notion of the individual as entrepreneur and the consumer who is capable, without the interference from state entities, to make better decisions regarding their personal welfare. Within neoliberal ideology the provision of social goods by broad government agencies is considered suspect. Private agencies, offering better consumer ‘choice’ then become the primary providers of social goods. Kenneth Saltman is worth quoting at length:

The genius of framing the amassing of political and economic control over public resources as individual consumer choice is that it takes on the deceptive appearance of increasing individual control while it actually removes individuals from collective control. Privatizers aim to treat the use of public resources as ‘shopping’ by ‘consumers,’ thereby naturalizing the public sector as a market—as a natural, politically-neutral entity ruled by the laws of supply and demand rather than as a matter of public priority, political deliberation, and competing values and visions. Such metaphors of consumer culture not only conceal the ways that public goods and services are different from markets (public services aim to serve public interest and collective goals not the amassing of private profit) but such appeals also fail to admit that markets themselves are hardly neutral and natural but are, on the contrary, hierarchical, human-made political configurations unequally distributing power and control over material resources and cultural value.65

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65 Saltman, “Schooling in Disaster Capitalism,” 141.
Indeed, the elimination of the public agency is envisioned. “The commodification of services and the privatization of public sector agencies demand institutional and cultural change. The profit-seeking corporation is promoted as the admired model for the public sector, and for much of civil society too.” Neoliberalism’s skepticism over the effectiveness and efficiency of public agencies to provide services in an increasingly competitive consumer marketplace continues to fuel the elimination of publically driven services toward the privatization and marketization of the public sphere. Perhaps a more insidious effect of the disappearance of publically initiated and provided services is the transformed role of the state under such conditions. Jeffrey DiLeo suggests that as neoliberal policies are actualized the state takes on less of a caregiving role for its citizens and becomes more punitive and authoritarian in its role to establish and maintain markets. When public agencies fail to ‘measure up’ to the efficiency standards of the market they are ridiculed as a waste of public time and money and penalized through various monetary sanctions.

Luxton calls Neoliberalism a “missionary faith”, recognizing that not only does Neoliberalism seek to liberate markets that already exist, but it endeavors to establish new markets where they were previously nonexistent. In her assessment Neoliberalism is unsatisfied with mere deregulation but takes up a continual strategy to commodify

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67 Di Leo, Neoliberalism, Education, and Terrorism, 4.
services. Services that were once met by family relationships, within communities, or even by public entities based on the rights of citizens, have become products for sale in the marketplace. The commodification of services places the rights of citizens and their connection to community in a precarious condition subject to the ‘bottom line’ of competition and profitability.

These three broad tenets I have identified here are certainty intertwined in a series of self-supporting and perpetuating ideological claims. In the next section I will endeavor to outline how these intertwining tenets show up in the background of three major works of educational policy. I ask the following questions: (1) How does the ‘Nation at Risk’ document reveal the ideological claims of Neoliberalism? (2) How does the NCLB policy show its commitment to neoliberal values? (3) Is the ‘Race to the Top’ policy a diversion from neoliberal commitments? And (4) Does the latest policy recall of NCLB and the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in the form of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) reveal a significant departure from the commitments of neoliberalism?

How does the ‘Nation at Risk’ document reveal the ideological claims of neoliberalism?

The rise of Neoliberalism in America can be linked with the presidency of Ronald Reagan (1981-1988). Out of the economic crisis of the late 1970s, his

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campaign promised to put an end to the big government (the Keynesian economic model) that he claimed was the cause of the crisis. Part of his plan was to abolish the newly developed Federal Department of Education. However, it was Reagan’s Secretary of Education, Terrance Bell who, amid budget reductions and White House rejections, created the National Commission for Excellence in Education. This 18-member bi-partisan commission set out to explore the state of American education. In 1983, the National Commission for Excellence in Education produced a report titled *A Nation at Risk*. As a report, and not a specific policy or set of policies, it is manageable in terms of the examination of its language that may reveal its ideological alignments with the emerging neoliberal thought of the time. Nevertheless, it remains a seminal document from which a variety of educational reforms and policies were born. The first paragraph of the report is revealing.

Our Nation is at risk. Our once unchallenged preeminence in commerce, industry, science, and technological innovation is being overtaken by competitors throughout the world. This report is concerned with only one of the many causes and dimensions of the problem, but it is the one that undergirds American prosperity, security, and civility. We report to the American people that while we can take justifiable pride in what our schools and colleges have historically accomplished and contributed to the United States and the well-being of its people, the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people. What was unimaginable a generation ago has begun to occur—others are matching and surpassing our educational attainments.\(^{70}\)

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\(^{69}\) Vinovskis, *From a Nation at Risk to No Child Left Behind*, 14–16.

\(^{70}\) The National Commission on Excellence in Education, “*A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*.”
Following the dire warning of national risk, it is clear that this is a story of competition in the marketplace, “our once unchallenged preeminence in commerce” (the first tenet of neoliberalism). It quickly points to education as one of the causes of this ‘takeover’ by competitors. The educational success of other nations is certainly not a cause for encouragement, but instead a threat to “our very future as a Nation.”

David Labaree notes that the report “represented education as a particular type of public good, which benefited American society by giving it the human capital it needed in order to be economically competitive with other nations.” The language of competition is stretched to the extreme in the second paragraph. While referring to the loss of the educational gains of the post-Sputnik area the report claims that “We have, in effect, been committing an act of unthinking, unilateral educational disarmament.”

Further down the notion of market competition is sharpened into focus.

The world is indeed one global village. We live among determined, well-educated, and strongly motivated competitors. We compete with them for international standing and markets, not only with products but also with the ideas of our laboratories and neighborhood workshops. America’s position in the world may once have been reasonably secure with only a few exceptionally well-trained men and women. It is no longer.

Indeed, the world is a global village, but it is not a village of cooperation, but of competition for products and ideas that threaten the security of our neighborhoods.

Douglas Harris suggests that the title of the document could have been ‘An Economy

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71 Labaree, “Consuming the Public School,” 387.
72 The National Commission on Excellence in Education, “A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform.” (emphasis added)
at Risk’ and notes that it is replete with economic terms. Learning itself is commodified in marketable, tradable terms. It is the “new raw material” in a world of “international commerce”. We find that “learning is the indispensable investment required” if we are to “improve on the slim competitive edge we still retain in world markets.” The report “sought to generate a moral panic surrounding the impending education crisis created by inept teachers, poor performing students and the inability of schools to respond to the new challenges posed by global competitiveness and to reframe education in economic and human capital terms.” Clearly, according to this document, the way to live in a global village is to be in a competition where the only option is to be on the top of the heap.

The document also reveals a strong commitment to individualism in the way that it conceives of personal responsibility and in the decontextualization of the learner and education itself from the broader social environment. As learning is conceived, it is now the personal responsibility of the individual to gain the skills necessary or be excluded. “…individuals in our society who do not possess the levels of skill, literacy, and training essential to this new era will be effectively disenfranchised…” This line may in fact be construed as blaming the victim; they are disenfranchised because they do not possess skills, not because of larger social, political or economic forces that work against them. Learners are individualized as future workers who must take

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73 Harris, Handel, and Mishel, “Education and the Economy Revisited,” 37.
74 Ward, Neoliberalism and the Global Restructuring of Knowledge and Education, 159.
personal responsibility for meeting the demands of “ever-accelerating competition and change” and are responsible for their own and the Nation’s prosperity. “These workers, and new entrants into the workforce, will need further education and retraining if they-- and we as a Nation--are to thrive and prosper.” The notion of ‘life-long learning’ is construed as an individual responsibility to gain skills in a rapidly changing marketplace. Education itself is decontextualized. It appears that education, not economic, political, or social conditions as a whole, is the deciding factor that determines whether Americans “thrive and prosper”. As “one great American industry after another falls to world competition” it is the fault of the mediocre education system, isolated from any other societal factors.

There is no specific call within the document to abandon federal support for public education, although this may have been Reagan’s hope for the committee’s final recommendations. The report served to focus public attention on a perceived educational crisis that watered down Reagan’s rhetoric against the Department of Education. There is indication that upon the presentation of the committee’s report, Reagan’s press conference admonished the NCEE for recommending the elimination of the Department of Education. However, its assessment of the public education system as a failure fell in line with the growing neoliberal political rhetoric of the suspicion of ‘big government’. The NAR report set in motion a climate toward institutional education that spawned continued reforms throughout the 1980s and

76 Ibid.
77 Guthrie and Springer, “‘A Nation at Risk’ Revisited,” 11.
1990s, many aligned with the neoliberal notion of trimming the public sector. In neoliberal minds, market-centered reforms could make government more efficient and profitable and therefore should be applied to educational institutions as well.\textsuperscript{78} Neoliberals tapped into the market mentality of ‘you get what you pay for’ and the perception that the federal money being spent on education was not ‘adding up’ to the results of a good economy. The NAR was clear to recommend test scores as a major measure of determining the value and productivity of teaching and learning. Little credit was given to education however, during the economically prosperous times of the 1990s. \textsuperscript{79}

**How does the NCLB policy show a commitment to neoliberal claims?**

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 was a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. The ESEA’s primary focus was to address various student inequalities by providing funds for educational assistance for low income students and the schools that serve them. Although stemming from the rationality of NAR and its intertwining of education with the economy, various reform projects throughout the 1990s set the stage for NCLB. The most fundamental policy changes enacted by NCLB were in how it reshaped the public function of education in terms of markets and placed the federal government in a punitive role concerning allocation of funds. NCLB focused on holding schools accountable for annual yearly progress (AYP) particularly for disadvantaged groups. This marked a shift from

\textsuperscript{78} Ward, *Neoliberalism and the Global Restructuring of Knowledge and Education*, 158.  
\textsuperscript{79} Harris, Handel, and Mishel, “Education and the Economy Revisited,” 39.
encouraging educational equity by providing equal inputs to a focus on assuring equal educational outputs based on standardized measures of progress. (Wells, 2009 in Harris, 2012). In the context of competition in a global economy education’s function is repositioned within society. A variety of market mechanisms aligned with business models of efficiency, standardization, and quantification push educational institutions into competitive relationships. Saltman recognizes that the NCLB policy “sets schools up for failure by making impossible demands for continual improvement. When schools have not met Adequate Yearly Progress, they are subject to punitive action by the federal government, including the potential loss of formerly guaranteed federal funding.” The questions of unequal funding are removed from the realm of socio-economic factors and placed in the arena of competition.

NCLB is heavily reliant on standardized testing results for its punitive action. And when underperforming schools fail to make adequate yearly progress they are forced to compete in the marketplace with private educational providers who claim to offer solutions more cost effectively and efficiently. Placing schools in direct competition aligns with the larger neoliberal discourse to shift social responsibilities away from government agency and into hands of the private marketplace. NCLB offers no other alternative than to focus on “increasing efficiency through testing, accountability, and choice.”

all schools to compete with each other for students and funds…” Failure to meet the standards is conceived as a problem due to the inadequacies of public agencies in general. Public schools are perceived to fail because they suffer from all the weaknesses of government agencies. This characteristic is isolated from the social or economic context of the schools in question. “[S]chools that serve low income students and students of color are held accountable for meeting ambitious goals without the resources they need.” This failure of public agency shows up curiously disproportionately in urban schools where the effect of low socio-economic status is more profound.

As funding shifts away from the public school due to its ‘failure’, policy space opens to for-profit charter schools. As they gain support, the move toward privatization is encouraged further. Under the guidelines of the NCLB, failing schools must offer remediation services through for-profit private agencies at the expense of their own funding. Instead of using public funds to help increase the effectiveness of struggling public schools, public money is siphoned away to private agencies concerned with profits. Patricia Burch reveals how NCLB has opened wide the door for privatization in the extremely competitive and lucrative testing market.

Test development firms have sought to use NCLB mandates to attract new business. Major suppliers of test development and preparation firms explicitly reference the No Child Left Behind Act on their Web pages,

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83 Gorlewski and Porfilio, Left Behind in the Race to the Top, 227.
84 Di Leo, Neoliberalism, Education, and Terrorism, 6.
and several named the law as spurring revenue in their recent financial statements. In addition, they all have links to the Department of Education’s Web site on No Child Left Behind, and include in their marketing materials references to how their products can help districts comply with NCLB.85

The cycle of failure-to-privatization is assumed to be the only viable option in the neoliberal equation. When public schools (particularly in urban communities) continue to fail on standardized measures of success these public efforts are perceived to be a gross misuse of public funds. In neoliberal logic, the answer to the problem is the competition that the private market can provide. With funding shifted to the private market, urban public schools play a game of catch up, trying to perform as well as suburban schools, yet with less overall funding available to be successful. Instead of contending with the inequalities of funding and their interconnection with the socio-economic factors that could lead to broader democratic input from communities, neoliberal privatization looks to market competition for final solutions.86

More importantly, privatization of schools within the NCLB framework increasingly narrows the need for public conversation and deliberation. “Privatizing public schools does not simply threaten to skim public tax money to provide rich investors with profit. Public schools differ from privately-controlled schools in that they harbor a distinct potential for public deliberation and oversight that privately owned and controlled educational institutions limit.”87 Without such public input and

85 Burch, “The New Educational Privatization.” 2590
87 Ibid., 133.
oversight, schools become increasingly separated from public view and are shaped toward the concerns that meet the needs of private companies within the marketplace. This renders them subject to bottom line profit considerations and the fickle desires of consumer choice. The increased role of standardized testing for success, accountability measures that come with punitive funding consequences, privatization, and the elimination of public discourse in schooling decisions places the NCLB policies squarely within the ideological commitments of Neoliberalism.

Is Race to the Top a diversion from neoliberal commitments?

As part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, the Obama administration and the Federal Department of Education under Secretary Arnie Duncan issued the Race to the Top (RTT) program. The RTT is an educational funding competition that provides educational grants to states that follow the guidelines of the ‘competition.’ The program’s guidelines are purported to help states develop standards to prepare their students for college and career, support the creation of quantified data measurement systems that could track student performance, retain and recruit effective teachers by linking student performance to teacher evaluation, all in an effort to improve schools that were failing under the current NCLB program. In order to be considered for the grants states were required to adopt the Common Core state standards and additional regiments of computerized testing. Under the guidelines
of the RTT limits on the number of charter schools allowed within a state were removed thus encouraging the expansion of private educational agencies.  

The RTT’s approach to funding as a market-based competition distinguishes it from any previous federal educational funding program and places it squarely within the claims of Neoliberalism. Even though it purports to spur innovative educational strategies that can be applied broadly, it singles out particular states and even localities within states with the best resources to develop strategies that conform to the guidelines. “The competition requires states to conform to criteria that have no evidentiary grounding, only the pulse of neoliberal common sense.” It creates winners and losers from the beginning which serve to put lower resourced districts further behind. “This approach to the allocation of educational funding for educational improvement is contradictory to aims of improving education for all since students that live in states that did not have competitive RTT applications are essentially penalized.” The inequalities of educational funding are deepened in a context of competition where the ‘best and the brightest’ have the advantage from the beginning and the socio-economic factors effecting achievement are made invisible. In the race for school funding, educational success is decontextualized, further intensifying inequalities.

88 “Recovery Act.”
89 Gorlewski and Porfilio, Left Behind in the Race to the Top, 228.
90 Harris, “Leveraging Change Via Competition,” 1.
The RTT reveals neoliberal commitments by its “over-reliance on charter schools as a turn-around strategy for schools with persistently low test scores. To be eligible for the funding, states must agree to close low-performing schools by turning them into public or privately run charter schools, or turning them over to private management companies.”  

It expands the notion of a worrisome public agency and promotes the continuation the neoliberal dream of privatization of the public sector. The private charter school as ‘the answer’ for the ‘failing’ public school system is fed by the continual focus on urban schools and their history of low performance on standardized tests and the exclusion of high achieving public schools. Overall, the move to charter schools blames the school in isolation from any other factors. Race to the Top, like NCLB, continues to “presume that if children do not succeed at school, the responsibility rests solely with the school. Such an approach destroys the structure and organization of a publicly-funded and presumably publicly-controlled system of education begun more than a century ago.”  

As long as education is conceived within the neoliberal frame, commodified in market terms, radically individualized, and removed from its social rootedness, it will continue to relinquish its role in the formation of the individual and a society that can function democratically. Neoliberalism’s vision of a market-based society has overshadowed every aspect of life and left us blind to the dream of democracy. As schools continue to conform to educational aims committed to the values of neoliberal  

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91 Gorlewska and Porfilio, Left Behind in the Race to the Top, 228.  
ideology they lose the ability to be places where children learn to be citizens in a
democratic society. If it is our hope to live in a democratic society, then, as Dewey
reminds us, our concept of education must function to support our aims.\(^{93}\) Education
almost exclusively framed in terms of preparation for the consumer market is a deep
rut that needs to be balanced with an educational philosophy that reinvigorates
thinking about the broader purposes of education for a vital democratic society.

**Does the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) reveal a significant departure from
the commitments of neoliberalism?**

The next iteration of federal education policy was signed into law in December
of 2015. Hailed as a victory for teachers’ unions and parents pressed by the excessive
testing and accountability regimes of NCLB, the reauthorization of the ESEA in the
form of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) has promised welcome relief. The
promise of “relief”, however, may be unfounded. The competitive market mentality of
measuring school performance based on test scores has only increased. The policy
offers perhaps more “opportunities” to compete. Though state performance targets and
school ratings are now shifted to state mandates instead of federal, it is unclear how
this shift will offer any improvement for local schools. “High need” schools will
continue to be subject to competitive programs to evaluate and reward teachers based
on student learning and Pre-K programs, while extra funding is commendable, will

\(^{93}\) Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 103.
now fall under the purview of the competitive market. Revealing too is the explicit embrace of “high-quality” charters as models in a competitive market scheme.  

Education secretary Arne Duncan made revealing remarks concerning the “improved” policy.  

Whereas No Child Left Behind prescribed a top-down, one-size fits all approach to struggling schools, this law offers the flexibility to find the best local solutions—while also ensuring that students are making progress. That means states are required to identify and intervene in schools where we don’t see the results we need, schools where an unacceptable number of students don’t graduate, or schools where huge disparities remain. Wherever those inequities persist, the federal law demands that we see real action. It requires that local leaders act to transform the odds for students in their schools.

Duncan’s remarks reveal a continued commitment to federal mandates with the “flexibility to find local solutions.” These local solutions will no doubt continue to be provided through “free market” educational providers further privatizing the “choices” for education consumers.

Regarding the use of test scores, Duncan says that “…states will rely on multiple measures of success—because as I have always said, no school and no educator should ever be judged by one test score alone.” Although there is an admission that there may be many ways to measure success, it remains unclear as to how judgement of success by “one test score” could lead to any other measures that would not include more test scores. If one test score alone does not provide a good

94 “Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) | U.S. Department of Education.”
95 Duncan, “Excerpts from Education Secretary Arne Duncan’s Prepared Remarks at the Learning Forward Conference Today, Dec. 8 | U.S. Department of Education.”
96 Ibid.
measure of success, then perhaps more tests will provide a clearer picture. “Multiple” measures may mean simply more tests, more data collections measured, more quantification of “learning”.

Wayne Au has called the ESSA the “Everything Stays the Same Act”. The only thing that will stay the same in this reauthorized policy is ‘business as usual’, the continued influence of neoliberal market mentality. What is clear in my reading is that the competitive forces of the market will intensify as a result of the ESSA. The policy language of competition will open the flood gates for a wider and deeper presence for private enterprise further stigmatizing and silencing the public interest in public schooling.

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97 Au et al., “Opting Out of the Education Reform Industry by Wayne Au • Monthly Review.”
Chapter 2: Religion in Schools as a Solution

Contrary to those who imagined with John Lennon, and perhaps Dewey himself, that religions would fade from the cultural tapestry, religion continues to play a significant role in human society. Pew studies record a general belief in God, though trending slightly downward, continue to be affirmed by more than 85 percent of Americans. Though we may have moved, as Charles Taylor has identified, from a culture where it was practically impossible not to believe in God to a culture where belief is one among many options, religion remains a definitive social and personally formative aspect of American life. As a cultural force in America, religion, and Protestant Christianity in particular, may have much to say to counteract the deleterious effects of neoliberalism. The church has long been the center for the development of a community that serves as a bulwark against the disintegrating effects of extreme individualism. Dewey, in an early writing, admonished the church to not lose its vital concern for social connection in light of its own individualizing tendencies.

There can be no doubt that Protestant religion has tended to an extreme individualism, and in its reaction against political ecclesiasticism has largely abdicated its proper function as a social organization. All society is based on

98 Street et al., “Religious Landscape Study.”
99 Taylor, A Secular Age.
the development of the universal side of the individual, and has as its function the realization of this universal element. The church lays this subordination of the individual to the ultimate universal, God, upon each as an obligation, and thus merely consciously proclaims what is unconsciously involved in the very substance of all society. For the church to become individualistic is, therefore, for it to commit suicide. The function of the church is precisely to see that men are bound together by truly universal or social relations. This is the establishment of the kingdom of God.  

Religions are well positioned to promote forms of community that shape individuals who are bonded together in common purpose. Religions are good at community. As Dewey suggests, their very life is dependent upon and nurtured by their social relations.

At the very center of religious devotion is the deep recognition that the true value and worth of the individual is not based upon market principles of monetary transaction. The intrinsic value of humanity and indeed all of life is rooted in its divine or sacred source. Religion makes the claim, in contrast to neoliberal market evaluation, that life cannot be ‘capitalized.’ Human life has inestimable value because life is a gift from God. In a culture that would seek to condition our anthropology in terms of marketing and commodification toward objectification, religion seeks to shape the sense of self around the irreplaceability of personhood. This kind of anthropology is “a mode of perceiving and valuing men and women as irreplaceable persons whose fundamental identities are fulfilled in covenantal relationships. A covenantal relationship is a mutual commitment of self-donation between free beings.

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capable of self-conscious reflection and self-possession.” Religion can provide the kind of self-identity that offers personal and communal resistance to the dehumanizing effects of consumer culture.

To the neoliberal claim that private enterprise is more advantageous than public agency religions offer their counter claim. Even the most culturally conservative religious groups offer good examples of the political work of public agency based on public community responsibility to society as opposed to profit seeking agencies. The non-profit work of religious groups continues to drive social change without the intervention of market competition as a ‘necessary’ component for quality.

The question then, is, why not use these strong aspects of religion as a direct intervention in the struggle against neoliberal schooling? The roots of American education began in the Protestant Christian religion as the quest to teach the young and preserve the faith. To the extent that American culture has maintained the vestiges of its Protestant upbringings, schooling continues to be a space where religion finds a voice. If schooling and education in general have been conceived in terms of their ability to solve social and economic problems within society, then Protestantism in particular finds a suitable partner in its work of redemption. This chapter will examine the place of religion in public schools as a supposed solution to the problem of neoliberal schooling.

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101 Kavanaugh, Following Christ in a Consumer Society, 51.
The relationship between religion and American public schools is intertwined, contentious, and set within the wider struggle for religious freedom. By the work of accident, compromise, and second choices the framers of the new constitution devised a uniquely American solution to the problem of religious freedom that would separate religion from its historic marriage with government apparatus. Considering the available state supported denominational options already in place, and without a majority consensus, James Fraser surmises that the framers had little choice for their design for federal intervention. “During the debates surrounding the adoption of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, there was almost no opposition to the radical disestablishment included in the final documents.”

The separation of religion from the work of the government placed the work of education in a problematic position. Though there was agreement in the new republic that religion should play a role in the formation of a good citizenry, the question of whose religion should prevail was a matter of debate. The task of education for much of European history had been given to a church established by the state. Where the purposes of the church (or a church) are established and supported by the ruling government there is no misalignment with church and state educational purposes. But the separation of church and state brought new questions to the role of education within a country that refused to establish an official religion in particular. The question of how to bring unity out of plurality.

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102 Fraser, Between Church and State, 13.
‘form a more perfect union’ was the question for the framers of the Constitution and for those who would think about the role of education in such a union.

In this chapter I will explore the history of the relationship between religion and American public schools. I will evaluate the proposal that a more robust presence for religion in schools will broaden the narrowed focus of education under the neoliberal hegemony. I will engage specifically with the work of Warren Nord and contend that his solution is ultimately unhelpful under the conditions of neoliberal schooling practices as they currently stand. In the overwhelming cacophony of neoliberal education policies Ward’s proposal gives little recognition of education as an act of politics and ignores the historic and continuing cultural dominance of Christianity in America. Suzanne Rosenblith reveals in her study of Georgia bible bills that “while public schools across the country are slowly becoming more open to the idea of more religion, the sort of religion and the type of religious education being served up should give those invested in preserving liberal educational ideals pause for concern.”\textsuperscript{103} Cathy Byrne, writing in the largely Christian context of Australia, recognizes that “the uncritical nature of some interfaith education initiatives encourages the continuation of cultural and theological bias.”\textsuperscript{104} I worry that the application of Ward’s proposal in the current climate of allegiance between neoliberal and conservative Christian thought will not only go unquestioned but serve to support dominant voices while continuing to silence those who have the least power. I will

\textsuperscript{103} Rosenblith, “Educating for Autonomy and Respect or Educating for Christianity?” 10.
\textsuperscript{104} Byrne, “Freirean Critical Pedagogy’s Challenge to Interfaith Education,” 47.
show that the work of Nel Noddings provides a broader more integrated approach that gives insight into ways of including existential questions within the school curriculum. Noddings’ “big questions”, though offering some initial vision for “life-oriented” education, however, does not go far enough in an effort to dismantle neoliberal practices in schools. Her ideas will provide perspective as I look to John Dewey for guidance on the ‘religious’ work of schools and his understanding of education as transformative of experience toward intelligent action in the world; the joining of theory and practice. This will be explored more extensively in the next chapter.

The heated mid-twentieth century debates surrounding the place of school prayer and bible reading have their roots in a long history that began in colonial America. The struggle for religious freedom and the experiment of colonial America was deeply influenced by the interacting and evolving ideological commitments of the Reformation and the Enlightenment. Colonial Protestant zeal was shaped from the Reformation struggle against Roman Catholic hegemony and the Enlightenment hope in the progress of humanity. The beliefs that pressed the colonies toward the ‘manifest destiny’ of American union emerged within this matrix. As Kaestle contends, “several beliefs contributed to this historical proposition—the superiority of Protestantism, the existence of a providential guiding hand in history, the improvability of human nature, the westward progress of civilization, and the supportive relationship between material

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105 Noddings, Educating for Intelligent Belief or Unbelief, 15.
and moral progress.”108 The Colonial Puritan mission to establish their city of God was an intensification of these beliefs in the establishment of the civic community. To the Puritan, “the good community was the community of believers, a city of God in the wilderness where religious treason could not be tolerated. The good society of believers was to be ruled not by majorities, which lacked biblical justification, but by the oligarchy of the elect as stewards of God, which was justified in scripture.”109 The focus on biblical justification, a particularly Protestant value, reinforced the necessity of literacy for the purpose of Bible reading. Biblical literacy formed the basis for the properly educated citizen and laid the foundation for the early institutions of education. Bound together,

…the educational goals of Christian and secular educators were remarkably similar. In traditional republican political thought, free institutions could only rest on the virtue of the citizenry, that is, on their devotion to the common good. Religious educators inculcated that respect for the social virtues that republicanism considered indispensable.110

Colonial Puritan social ideals of persistence, hard work, temperance, and practicality accorded well with humanism’s optimism and helped assuage some of the early tensions in the widening metaphysical divide between Reformation and Enlightenment commitments.

108 Kaestle, Pillars of the Republic, 94.
110 Howe, “Church, State, and Education in the Young American Republic,” 13–14.
Colonial Church and State relations took up the patterns of their European progenitors. Colonies in Virginia and the Carolinas maintained a pattern of State authority over the church. New England colonies formed quasi-theocratic entities influenced by Calvinistic proclivities that fused state and religious authorities. However, the irony of tightened religious authority that led to increased religious pluralism complicated the Church and State relationship for the emerging independent government. Karier notes two major trends that set the groundwork for the 1791 disestablishment in the First Constitutional Amendment. The first was that the growing plurality of religious sects made it virtually impossible to use the strength of the state in support of any particular sectarian interest. And secondly, state recognition had to shift from one established religion to many religious traditions.\textsuperscript{111} The complications of religious plurality and the use of tax dollars to support various religious sects opened the way for Enlightenment leadership to argue more vociferously for disestablishment. Both Jefferson and Madison supported the separation of Church and State. Butts notes that at the adoption of the First Amendment, nine colonies had already shifted to complete Church and State separation, leaving the other four organized around multiple establishment.\textsuperscript{112}

The influx of Catholic immigrants to New England in the early 19\textsuperscript{th} century bought diversity and tension to what was a predominantly Protestant vision of America. Growing religious diversity in Massachusetts, in particular, lead to the 1827

\textsuperscript{111} Karier, \textit{The Individual, Society, and Education}, 35–37. \\
\textsuperscript{112} Butts, \textit{American Tradition in Religion and Education}.
act to block the use of sectarianism in local school textbooks, followed in 1833 by the
formal disestablishment of the Congregational Church. Soon after, Horace Mann took
the reigns as secretary of the first state board of education from 1837 to 1849. Mann
was convinced that the union of society could be secured through common schools
with a purpose to teach the best of religion and morality apart from sectarianism.
Fraser contends that

Horace Mann understood better than most of his contemporaries that in
a nation without a single established church, some new institution
needed to step in to fill the void. Some force had to continue the
process of shaping and carrying the common culture and morality if
there was to be a unified people. And what better to fill the role than an
institution that had long been an arm of the church, the common
school?¹¹³

Of course along with the promise of unity comes the pain of union. Mann’s vision of a
common school with a common religion would turn out to be exclusive of any group
that did not share his Protestant, even Unitarian perspective. The implications of his
view that the Bible could be read “without note or comment” came to greater tension
as religious diversity grew.

Although in many states the impetus for schooling was shaped by Protestants
with the notion that their particular form of civil religion was best for uniting a
growing nation, the perils of a ‘common’ school with a ‘common’ religion continued
to surface, particularly in growing urban areas of the mid-19th century. The clash of

¹¹³ Fraser, Between Church and State, 31.
Protestants and Catholics in New York pushed public schools to generalize their religious content toward a secularized curriculum that further polarized religious tensions. The growing populations of Catholics and Jews confronted the use of the King James Version of the Bible in the predominantly Protestant controlled schools of Cincinnati. Protestant leaders did not intend “schools to be secular in any twentieth-century meaning of that word. Rather, they believed that evangelical Protestants could work together across a limited range of denominational lines to create a national culture in which they would all be comfortable.”114 By the end of the ninetieth and into the twentieth century this Protestant belief was a fading dream. Particularly in urban areas a shift occurred from a generalized Protestantism toward a broad theistic vision by the end of the century, to an even more secularized notion of American democratic values into the next century.115 The massive influx of immigrants, growing industrialization, and the implications of Darwin’s *Origen of Species* brought social, economic, and intellectual changes that broadened perspectives, making the question of a common society and a common school more difficult to answer.

Around the turn of the century there were several options for thinking about the religion and public school debate. Robert Michaelsen outlines the schools of thought put forth by contemporary social reformer William Bliss. One option was to consider religion a personal matter that did not belong in the schools. Others contended that the state should teach morality and in positing the irreducible alliance

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114 Ibid., 33.
115 Ibid., 57.
between religion and morality, the state should teach some form of religion. A third claimed an even stronger role for sectarian forms of religious moral teaching. A fourth ‘method’ suggested that schools should not teach explicit religion but could recognize the religious and spiritual nature in various aspects of existence. However these options played out, it was a tenuous and sometimes volatile struggle to gain common ground.

While localities where struggling to define the role of religion in the schools’ work to shape a common life, national attention was focused on the 1925 trial of John Scopes, the Tennessee Science teacher who violated the state law prohibiting the teaching of evolution. The rising influence of Darwin’s work had found its way into science textbooks and science classrooms further polarizing the issues of religion in schools. At the same time a growing Fundamentalist Protestant Christianity lined up against what they saw as the increasing secularization of the schools brought on by Darwin’s theories. Although Scopes’ guilty verdict was eventually overturned, Fraser reminds us that the trial had profound cultural implications that marginalized Fundamentalism but made textbook publishers retreat from Darwin’s controversial ideas. Religion, and evolution in particular, continued to be a volatile subject and the question of how to form a common society through the schools continued to be unanswered.

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116 Michaelsen, Piety in the Public School; Trends and Issues in the Relationship between Religion and the Public School in the United States., 134–35.
117 Fraser, Between Church and State, 124–26.
In their book *Taking Religion Seriously Across the Curriculum*, Warren Nord and Charles Haynes argue for the inclusion of the study of religion in the public school curriculum for civic, constitutional, and educational reasons. Civic reasons to include religion in the curriculum have to do with building the common ground necessary for living together with a commitment of respect. Civil respect means that despite various religious differences all voices get taken seriously. Constitutional reasons focus on the neutrality of the First Amendment Establishment clause in order that government agencies to remain fair. Schools should not support nor inhibit religion, but neither should schools ignore religious ways of thinking and living. Educational reasons focus on the inclusion of religion as a part of what it means to be liberally educated. To be liberally educated is to have access to the broad cultural conversation which includes religion and religious ways of making sense of life. Their arguments are admittedly secular and focus on a model they call the “civic” public school, “where people of all faiths and no faith are treated with fairness and respect.”  

The strength of their proposal lies not on the truth claims of particular religions, but on religious liberty rights within a liberal democratic society. If public schools are truly public, then they should take the public seriously and include secular and religious points of view that make up a vital democratic society. Nord and Haynes are right in their call for “a shared vision of religious liberty that provides the civic framework for the debate.”

In arguing for the inclusion of religion in the curriculum their ‘bottom line’ is their

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119 Ibid., 33.
vision of a liberal education that initiates students “into a conversation about what makes life meaningful.” The purpose of a liberal education is to “initiate students in a critical discussion of the major ways of making sense of the world so that they are in some position to responsibly judge what is true and good all things considered.”

Even though they claim “no hard and fast lines between spirituality, traditional religion, and those functional “secular” religions, they do, unlike Dewey, draw a sharp distinction between the religious and the secular, seemingly aligning secular with a “scientific worldview”.

For most of history, the governing worldviews of civilization have been religious; but over the course of the last several centuries in the West, modern science has come to provide the dominant worldview of our civilization and, as a result, shape our educational system. In the process, what counts as reasonable (and what counts as a matter of faith) has changed. True, if we assume the adequacy of the modern scientific worldview, religion is likely to appear as a matter of faith or even superstition…

It is not clear what Nord and Haynes mean by the “adequacy of the modern scientific worldview” other than to suggest that ‘science doesn’t have all the answers’. The ‘scientific worldview’, though indisposed to claim final answers, has certainly been and continues to be a pragmatic success. The scientific worldview ‘works’ and has had tremendously successful explanatory and predictive power concerning the natural world by its methods of evidence gathering and experimentation. Where the claims of

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120 Ibid., 37.
121 Ibid., 57.
122 Ibid., 41 (emphasis original).
religion contradict scientific findings we proceed by methods of experimentation and
the gathering of evidence to substantiate those claims. There are certainly other “ways
of making sense of the world”. However, there are some “ways” that don’t make
sense. Changing what “counts as reasonable” or “what makes sense” seems to be an
inevitable condition. It makes no sense that objects are drawn to the earth due to their
‘essential nature’. We no longer count it reasonable to maintain that the world is flat.
We recognize that clinical depression is the result of brain chemistry and to claim
demonic possession seems unreasonable. Given the preponderance of evidence, a
6000-year-old earth does not ‘make sense’. In spite of all our ‘ritual’ efforts, to
consider that a supernatural being would take sides and help our football team win
seems unreasonable.

Nord’s claim that the secular “scientific worldview” in education is
exclusionary and even hostile to the religious way of understanding the world is the
principle argument in his earlier and more extensive work *Religion and American
Education* (1995). The exclusion of the religious way of understanding the world is for
Nord a case of indoctrination. Since “[i]ndoctrination is the uncritical initiation of
students into some particular ideology or worldview” schools, primarily through the
use of textbooks, “fail to provide students with the intellectual and emotional
resources that would enable them to take religion seriously.”123 Nord does not address
the degree to which information in textbooks actually drive classroom instruction nor

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the extent of influence the overall mass media culture has on the students’ intellectual and emotional resources. He wonders, however, if the religion that children learn at home makes a difference. He seems doubtful even though he admits a “striking measure of vitality”\(^\text{124}\) for religion in America. However, to make his case for indoctrination, he offers an analogy.

Consider a Christian academy in which students study fundamentalist theology for twelve years but never take a course in science, though scientific beliefs are occasionally mentioned, albeit briefly, in history textbooks (which are written by fundamentalist theologians). Teachers are not required to have any education in science. The first chapter of Genesis provides students with their understanding of biology, history starts with Adam and Eve in the year 4004 B.C., and morality is a simple matter of memorizing the Ten Commandments and the Beatitudes. (No secular alternatives are mentioned.) Would students be indoctrinated in such a school? Surely they \textit{would} be indoctrinated—even if they could learn science from their parents or watch “Nova” on public TV.\(^\text{125}\)

This consideration surely makes the point of indoctrination in such a case. However, it does not follow that this is the case for public schools. The reason that the ‘Christian academy’ provides a clear case of indoctrination is not because of the amount of time it spends mentioning scientific beliefs or whether it weighs one set of beliefs against another. It stands as a case of indoctrination because its conclusions about the biological, historical, and geological world are the result of a closed uncritical religious dogma instead of open to the broad \textit{methods} of science. Perhaps the essential problem with Nord’s claim of indoctrination is that the ‘scientific worldview’, instead

\(^{124}\) Ibid., 61.  
\(^{125}\) Ibid., 188.
of being an “uncritical initiation… into some ideology” is itself open to critical scrutiny. Indeed, science as a method invites challenge and alternative explanation. Scientific progress in various fields of study is based upon the refusal to insulate ideas from critical experimentation and the open invitation to explore alternatives. The methods of science are driven by its openness to examination. This is what makes the claim of indoctrination false. Nord states that, “the scientist and the conservative theologian are each committed to thinking critically or rationally within their respective worldviews, but neither is open to thinking critically or reasonably about their foundational assumptions, their worldview.”126 With an appeal to the work of Thomas Kuhn and other philosophers and theologians, Nord claims that there is “No doubt religion is more “subjective” than science, but, so the argument goes, the differences are those of degree, not kind.”127 It seems to me that the issue of the ‘degree’ to which a discipline is free from subjectivity is precisely the problem. Kuhn’s work in fact suggests that although much of the work of science is conducted within the ‘subjective bubbles’ of the paradigm, it ‘progresses’ when those ‘bubbles’ break open due to anomalous evidence that has explanatory and predictive power. If religion had such explanatory and predictive power, if it was open to the kind of rigorous search for evidence that the methods of science entail, it would lose its tendency to be viewed as mere superstition. The reason few scientists “feel any obligation to take seriously religious ideas in the practice of their science,” is the

126 Ibid., 182.
127 Ibid., 414, note 51.
degree to which religions’ subjective bubbles remain impenetrable to anomalous evidence. Instead, religions work to insulate their core beliefs from critical scrutiny.

Dewey, though recognizing the success of scientific advancements in helping us understand the natural world, does not draw distinct lines of separation. If religion is unable to provide the explanatory and predictive benefits of science then as Dewey suggests, it should be reconstructed. A reconstruction allows for the religious attitude and the scientific attitude to coexist. Dewey claims that the methods of science, particularly as it relates to physical and industrial successes should be ‘tempered’ by the same methods in social processes. This has been our problem, according to Dewey, as we have applied the methods of science to solving many of our material problems, so we need to apply these same methods to solving our social problems. This is where appeal to religion as an appeal to the supernatural to solve our problems is misguided according to Dewey. In his understanding of the religious, Dewey wants to value the religious nature of human relational experience without the need to appeal to the particular doctrinal claims of traditional religions. Nord and Haynes claim that the “problem is not just that educators ignore religious accounts of morality; it is that the secular worldview that pervades modern education renders religion suspect.”

Dewey would claim that it is religion’s appeal to the supernatural, the transcendent, that makes religion suspect, not that its claim to morality is invalid.

128 Nord and Haynes, Taking Religion Seriously across the Curriculum, 189.
Nord’s implicit claim, like many religious conservatives, is that the decline of morality is in a causal relationship with the rise of the scientific worldview, that ‘taking God out of the schools’ and out of the public domain has been asking for trouble. This view is of course suspect. Can we really say that a religious worldview, in a pre-enlightenment world, was more moral than our modern world? Within such a worldview, shouldn’t we expect that a world saturated with religion (i.e. the overlapping history of the ‘big three’ monotheistic faiths -seventh to sixteenth centuries) would be the most moral? Contrary evidence for such an expectation clearly abounds. Perhaps there is nothing more insidious than religious coercion or abuse. It may be helpful to think of the relationship between religious education and religious commitment in the British system where religious education is an integral part of the British curriculum. Drawing causal lines here could lead one to conclude that the greater degree to which religion is a focus of study, the less one is inclined toward religious commitment.\textsuperscript{129}

In \textit{Religion and American Education} Nord outlines the ‘secularization’ of American education from its colonial \textit{religious} purposes to “make Christians” by nurturing Christian belief and action to its \textit{secular} purposes that value “Americanism, pluralism and liberty, science and technology, economics and vocationalism.”\textsuperscript{130} Nord admits that sectarian education became impossible, Protestant hegemony became “too heavy a burden for common schools” and after recounting the quagmire of the history

\textsuperscript{129} Nord, \textit{Religion and American Education}, 135.
\textsuperscript{130} Ibid., 97.
of religion and public schooling still seems to wonder why there is such “little concern…for incorporating religion into public education.”¹³¹ In his chapter on indoctrination Nord admits that the more educated a person is the more secular they become and the more likely they are to be religious liberals. Referring to a 1981 survey, he reveals that “more than half of those with a grade school education viewed the Bible as literally true, while only a fifth of college graduates believe this.”¹³² We might assume that this gap has widened over the last 35 years. Even so, Nord claims that the reason for such secularization is that conservatism is not taught in schools and “most students do not study religion.” To his argument for indoctrination Nord claims that to ignore religion, that is, conservative religion, is to “privilege scientific over religious accounts”¹³³ of truth. Nord seems astonished that “religion does not appear in science and social science textbooks not just because it is controversial but because within a scientific worldview religious claims cannot be taken seriously as candidates for the truth.”¹³⁴ He suggests that a “theologically testable” truth claim would meet the criteria as a candidate for truth but offers no clue as to what such a test might entail. The larger problem to offering a religious worldview as a scientific candidate for truth is the problem of a fair characterization of a particular position. Nord speaks to this by suggesting that alternative positions must be characterized from “the inside” by advocates who can “tell their own stories and make their own cases as much as

¹³¹ Ibid., 63–97.  
¹³² Ibid., 162.  
¹³³ Ibid., 163.  
¹³⁴ Ibid., 164.
possible.”135 The problem here is in choosing the proper advocates. The complex issues of who will decide which religious perspectives are chosen and which “inside” advocates tell their stories and what evidence they present is left for further debate. And debate it will be, considering our history.

Nord displays a substantially lingering grief over the loss of Protestant cultural hegemony. He concludes that “…we have lost our spiritual balance. We badly need to reassert the importance of duty and virtue, tradition and community, compassion and sacrifice, reverence for nature, and even, perhaps, sin and guilt.”136 With the exception of compassion and reverence for nature, these sound like an appeal to return to the ‘good old days’ when Protestant ideas ruled the cultural discourse. A reverence for sin and guilt betrays his longing for a way to strong-arm the morally wayward into submission. He seems to hope in the situation where a particularly American brand of religion can stand toe to toe with non-religion in some kind of duel for the spiritual restoration of America.

To this concern, Suzanne Rosenblith reveals that “while public schools across the country are slowly becoming more open to the idea of more religion, the sort of religion and the type of religious education being served up should give those invested in preserving liberal educational ideals pause for concern.”137 In her study of Georgia Bible bills she contends that the exclusive use of the Bible and a particular version of the Bible as the sole text in religious education courses compromises the goals of

135 Ibid., 167.
136 Ibid., 381.
137 Rosenblith, “Educating for Autonomy and Respect or Educating for Christianity?” 10.
liberal education. If liberal education is about “helping students to develop the skills and tools to be autonomous thinkers and respectful citizens”\(^\text{138}\), then “choosing a specific translation of the bible, which will inevitably reflect a single religious perspective, compromises attempts at fostering religious pluralism’s goals of understanding and respect.”\(^\text{139}\) Rosenblith calls for a more integrative approach, much like Noddings, that incorporates religious difference as a way to understand and value perspectives that are different from one’s own. Cathy Byrne, writing in the largely Christian context of Australia, recognizes that “the uncritical nature of some interfaith education initiatives encourages the continuation of cultural and theological bias.”\(^\text{140}\) She wonders, with bell hooks, if dominate cultures can properly represent under-represented cultures and in the particular case of religious education, is concerned that “as purveyors of the dominant theology…, Christians may not be best placed to identify a Christian agenda.”\(^\text{141}\) She cites a particular university teacher education course in Religious Values and Education that claims grounding in philosophical, ethical, and multi-faith disciplines but offers only limited Western sources. The absence of Eastern religious and philosophical traditions points to her noted claim that teachers from and with dominant cultural traditions “act as accomplices to socially structured prejudice.”\(^\text{142}\) Byrne concludes that within the context of interfaith education, the…

\(^{138}\) Ibid., 22.
\(^{139}\) Ibid., 23.
\(^{140}\) Byrne, “Freirean Critical Pedagogy’s Challenge to Interfaith Education,” 47.
\(^{141}\) Ibid., 50.
\(^{142}\) Ibid., 51.
other cannot be limited to the similar. The Christian’s other must include the internally diverse perspectives of atheist Humanists, non-theist Buddhists, all variety of polytheist, monist and panentheist Hindu, idolising animists, syncretising spiritualists, indifferent Laodicians and ever-undecided agnostics. This requires a radically expanded recognition of otherness and a large dose of humility to alert us to the risks of overvaluing our identity.\textsuperscript{143}

This is a tall educational order for which Nord’s implicitly Christian perspective does not account.

Bryne, is right to call for a Freirean, and Deweyan, commitment to “open, critical learning” that places the responsibility on teachers to be self-critical of their own privileged positions and proactive toward the inclusion of authentic voices of the other\textsuperscript{144} in the context of religious education. It is not so much the inclusion of religion that will facilitate this kind of context for critical discussion, but at base, a strong democratic vision of life together that will open opportunities for wider fields of human knowledge and expression. Perhaps it is not that educators hold religion suspect or view it as a private matter, but that they lack Deweyan categories and vision to see the religious implications of a vital democratic educational context that would open the possibilities for critical conversations about “what makes life meaningful.”

The critical conversations and discussions that Nord and Haynes as well as Swidler and Küng envision are precisely the skills and competencies that are eroded by neoliberal practices in schools. Instead of asking the questions that might help students understand themselves as democratic citizens who participate in the forming

\textsuperscript{143} Ibid., 55–56 (emphasis original).

\textsuperscript{144} Byrne, “Freirean Critical Pedagogy’s Challenge to Interfaith Education.”
of life together, education is increasingly narrowed toward job preparation and economic success. With this “nailing down”\textsuperscript{145} of education to such a narrow focus, students’ exposure to a variety of intellectual skills and practices that would help them form critical thinking and communication abilities is severely limited. Efforts to standardize and over-quantify educational ‘achievement’ calls for “scripted lessons, high-stakes testing, “banking education,” and approaches to teaching and learning that are effectively prohibitions on thinking.”\textsuperscript{146} With the erosion of these kinds of capacities, the possibility of educating a citizenry that can maintain democratic ways of living becomes jeopardized. When learning is thinned by the notion of what works in the economic marketplace we lose a deeper engagement with democratic processes that require the political artistry of “communication and negotiation through the skills of deliberation, contestation and debate.”\textsuperscript{147} Dewey envisioned a vital democratic community continually renewed through the educative processes of schools and other social institutions. Without a citizenry educated in and through democratic ways of being, the possibilities of a resulting democratic society are diminished.

Democracy cannot flourish where the chief influences in selecting subject matter of instruction are utilitarian ends narrowly conceived for the masses… [it] is based upon ignorance of the essentials needed for realization of democratic ideals... it assumes that in the future, as in the past, getting a livelihood, ‘making a living,’ must dignify for most men and women doing things which are not significant, freely chosen, and ennobling to those who do them; doing things which serve ends unrecognized by those engaged in them, carried on under the direction of others for the sake of pecuniary reward.\textsuperscript{148}

\textsuperscript{145} Sleeter, “Equity, Democracy, and Neoliberal Assaults on Teacher Education,” 1952.
\textsuperscript{146} Di Leo, \textit{Neoliberalism, Education, and Terrorism}, 81–82.
\textsuperscript{147} Olssen, “Understanding the Mechanisms of Neoliberal Control,” 225.
\textsuperscript{148} Dewey, \textit{Democracy and Education}, 226 (emphasis added).
For Dewey, education should be about enlightenment upon the “deepest problems of common humanity” and presented with relevance to the “problems of living together.”\textsuperscript{149}

This discussion would not be complete without including the work of Nel Noddings. Her concern in \textit{Educating for Intelligent Belief or Unbelief} is the inclusion of important existential questions throughout the school curriculum. She, like Nord, insists on the need for discussion and critical thinking, but her approach is more integrative.

Existential questions should form the organizing backbone of the curriculum, and they should be appropriate everywhere. We rob study of it richness when we insist on rigid boundaries between subject matters, and the traditional disciplinary organization makes learning fragmentary and – I dare say—boring and unnecessarily separated from the central issues of life.\textsuperscript{150}

Her approach to integrate the curriculum with “deep human questions” is set within an educative environment that allows teachers and students to go beyond the standardized subject matter and explore the questions and issues that really matter to human beings.\textsuperscript{151} Just as she has an appreciation for the way that these human issues seep into all areas of the curriculum, she draws no sharp division between religious and secular. Instead of pitting science against religion she recognizes that all claims must be subject to the methods of modern inquiry and open to ambiguity. “It is a vital task

\begin{footnotes}
\item[149] Ibid., 226–27.
\item[150] Noddings, \textit{Educating for Intelligent Belief or Unbelief}, 8.
\item[151] Ibid., 137–38.
\end{footnotes}
of education to help students gather evidence, assess arguments, discriminate among authorities, construct counter-arguments, and challenge claims. Education should promote a tolerance for unavoidable ambiguity and an appreciation for subtle differences."152 Though she is clear to draw boundaries between the public arena committed to such methods and the practice of private religion, she is also clear that the full range of human experience should be included. In the specific cases where science and religious belief make contradictory claims teachers have a responsibility to discuss a wide range of possible solutions with openness and sensitivity. “…such discussions do not have to end with, ‘Now here’s the truth.’ The best teachers will be prepared to present not only the full spectrum of belief but also the variety of plausible ways in which people have tried to reconcile their religious and scientific beliefs.”153 Noddings understands that education for life, for what it means to be human, requires the exploration of these deep existential questions.

The exclusion of the formal teaching of religion in schools is, Noddings says, the “right decision.”154 While she promotes the kind of deep questions and discussions within the purview of world religions she is adamant that these find open territory in all aspects of the curriculum. Within this, she acknowledges the crucial problem of Fundamentalism and admits that “Education, even if it does not treat religion explicitly, always endangers blind faith, but it does not necessarily destroy belief; it

152 Ibid., 7–8.
153 Ibid., 143–44.
154 Ibid., 134.
may indeed deepen it.”\textsuperscript{155} Taken further, however, her approach leaves little room for belief in anything but a very thin version of religion. While acknowledging the appalling ignorance of Americans concerning religion and the “theoretical” practicality of including critical religious discussions in public schools, she is aware of the real and political problems of exposing religious faith to critical inquiry. “[I]t may be impossible to promote historically accurate and critical discussion of religion and nonbelief.”\textsuperscript{156} The kind of open inquiry she admires makes room for the nonrationality of experiences of mystery and awe, but is intellectually annoyed by the irrationality of supernatural belief. It is difficult to see how, after her theoretical approach to the critical study of religion, one could ‘return’ to religious belief. Her admiration for the “new outspoken atheists” for their “insistence on telling the historical truth and pressing (gently) the question: Why do you believe these things?”\textsuperscript{157} puts the religionists, and supernaturalists in particular, on notice that their irrational beliefs will not only not go unquestioned, but may be excluded as unintelligent.\textsuperscript{158}

Perhaps this chasm is unbridgeable and the only practical way to live together is, as Noddings also suggests, to find ways to work together on “common ground,”\textsuperscript{159} solving common human problems as best we can and putting aside our irreconcilable differences. The ‘practical’ and political difficulties of including critical religious study and discussion in the public schools calls into question the

\textsuperscript{155} Ibid., 143.
\textsuperscript{156} Noddings, “The New Outspoken Atheism and Education,” 387.
\textsuperscript{157} Ibid., 388.
\textsuperscript{158} Noddings, \textit{Educating for Intelligent Belief or Unbelief}, 143.
\textsuperscript{159} Noddings, “The New Outspoken Atheism and Education,” 386.
theory itself. Until we are ‘smart’ enough to theorize our way across the chasm, our best Deweyan move is to experiment with ways to solve our very human problems with as much intelligence and cooperation as we can muster.

In a more recent work, Noddings, concerned again with education for real life, calls for a renewed discussion of educational aims that would serve to counter the current focus on economic preparation. She writes, “...public schools in liberal democracies pay very little attention to preparation for personal life. Most of our attention goes to preparation for higher forms of education, and thus for the world of paid work.”

Noddings claims that in emphasizing the singular ends of schooling as economic we have ignored the wide range of human experiences that contribute to a thriving personal life. We have reduced the scope of education to what makes for financial success and closed off other possibilities for the attainment of happiness. We are making a mistake, she argues, in thinking that students who are academically and vocationally prepared for economic success will have the necessary skills to provide what it takes to build happy lives and better homes for their families.

This is a particularly important question to ask in neighborhoods of poverty where often the existential questions of home and happiness are ignored in the schools’ singular focus on academic achievement. By ignoring educational aims that help students explore the qualitative aspects of human life we limit their capacities for self-development and participation in community problem solving.

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161 Ibid., 204.
162 Ibid., 95.
Noddings identifies the dominance of current educational aims focused on keeping the United States economy strong and giving every child an opportunity to succeed financially. These aims are “worrisome” in that they drive the standards movement. She questions the way that schools have been intemperately cast as failing in their role to keep the economy competitive even in times of consummate prosperity. And she notes the inherent illogical assumption that equity can be achieved by such an environment of punitive accountability and forced curriculum standardization.\textsuperscript{163} Our measures of success have come to focus narrowly on academic success that leads to college and the work that requires college. Noddings wonders about the wide variety of work in our society that does not require a college education. She asks, “Do these people represent failures of schooling, or do we fail them when we lead them to believe that only economic success is success?”\textsuperscript{164} Noddings argues that reducing the trend toward the narrow focus of schooling for economic ends will require that we “educate enthusiastically for personal life” with the existential questions of what makes for full human living looming large, not simply on the level of discussion, but in the ways that we prepare students for a wide range of possible futures.\textsuperscript{165} Full human living requires those skills of associated living which Dewey calls democratic. This is the same necessary ‘skill set’ that arises within the social context where the “deepest problems of our common humanity” are addressed. Noddings envisions an educational environment where “young people will remain in touch with those human

\textsuperscript{163} Ibid., 84.
\textsuperscript{164} Ibid., 35 (emphasis original).
\textsuperscript{165} Ibid., 204.
responses we associate with caring: sympathy, motivational displacement (the desire to help and share), tenderness, outrage and disgust at cruelty, generosity, a willingness to listen and be moved.”

Promoting educational environments that loom large with these kinds of human responses will lead us to ask the kinds of questions that decouple the current educational relationship of economic success and what makes for a better life.

Our current educational climate under the practices of neoliberal economic claims continue to narrow the definition of what it means to be educated as well as in broader existential terms, what it means to be fully human. In conforming to the demands of neoliberal education we pursue only what is valuable in terms of the competitive marketplace.

With the emergence of standards, testing, accountability, and free market competition as the driving forces behind public school reform, the basic aims of education are increasingly defined in terms of preparing students for work in the competitive global marketplace. Dewey would surely denounce this trend, for he viewed the purposes of education in more expansive terms — not just as job preparation, but as preparation for democratic citizenship and for a variety of callings requiring exposure to a broad spectrum of knowledge, skills, and dispositions.

Yet for all the criticisms of current neoliberal educational practices and for all the efforts to reassert aims that focus on the development of a democratic citizenry, it is important to remember Dewey’s warning. He warns that any vision or method of education has the potential to become “mechanical” if it has an end which is external,

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166 Ibid., 163.
if it does not arise from within the context of human social relations. This is a dynamic and continually evolving context that calls for continual growth. “[T]here is nothing to which growth is relative save more growth, there is nothing to which education is subordinate save more education…the purpose of school education is to insure the continuance of education by organizing the powers that insure growth.”\[^{168}\] Dewey warns that our best aspirations, our faith in education, can become a *religion* instead of *religious* if we stubbornly refuse growth and change. The *religious* nature of schools “testifies to a generous conception of human nature and to a deep belief in the possibilities of human achievement in spite of all its past failures and errors.” This, Dewey claims, is an acceptable form of religious devotion. The danger, however, is in the codification of any existing practice.

A faith becomes insincere and credulity injurious only when aspiration and credence are converted into dogmatic assertion; only when the importance of their objects is made the ground of asserting that we already have at hand the adequate means of attaining them, thereby attaining salvation. Worship of education as a symbol of unattained possibilities of realization of humanity is one thing; our obstinate devotion to existing forms—to our existing schools and their studies and methods of instruction and administration or to suggested specific programs of improvement—as if they embodied the object of worship—is quite another thing.\[^{169}\]

Our current religious infatuation, our worship of quantification, standardization, and accountability measures that align with market ideals have not only limited the inclusion of the study of religion or the religious, or even the

\[^{168}\] Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 60.
discussion of existential questions about the meaning of life, but have broken down
the very democratic processes of deliberation and engagement that allow for such
inclusion. Simply including the study of religion as a separate subject within the
existing model will not stem the tide. Religion is suspect not because it does not have
value for the broader society. The deep existential questions of life are not addressed
because they have no relevance to the public. These important matters are continually
marginalized because we lack a robust democratic vision of education that recognizes
the deeply religious nature of the educative process. We are blind to the broader
possibilities for education when we are so narrowly focused on neoliberal market
goals. The religious nature of the educative process is rooted in a faith in the human
possibilities for continual improvement within democratic ways of living. This will
lead us to see beyond the tight constraints of neoliberal possibilities that have become
the educational religion of the day. As Dewey warned, “Each generation is inclined to
educate its young so as to get along in the present world instead of with a view to the
proper end of education: the promotion of the best possible realization of humanity as
humanity.”170 The educational work of preparing the young for active participation in
democratic processes, for associated living that has faith in the possibilities of human
social development and leads students to think critically and compassionately about
their own world and what makes for full human living is infinitely more difficult than
preparing them to “achieve” on standardized tests. This kind of educational work is
the humane work of schools to prepare the young to cooperate in human communities

170 Dewey, Democracy and Education, 111.
instead of simply competing in an economic marketplace. This difficult work is the ‘religious’ work of schools.
Chapter 3: John Dewey and the ‘Religious’ Work of Schools

For John Dewey, the religious nature of the educative process is rooted in a faith in the human possibilities for continual improvement within democratic ways of living. “Each generation is inclined to educate its young so as to get along in the present world instead of with a view to the proper end of education: the promotion of the best possible realization of humanity as humanity.” The educational work of preparing the young for active participation in democratic processes, for associated living that has faith in the possibilities of human social development and leads students to think critically and compassionately about their own world and what makes for full human living is infinitely more difficult than preparing them to “achieve” on standardized tests. This kind of educational work is the humane work of schools to prepare the young to cooperate in human communities instead of simply competing in an economic marketplace. Dewey called this work the “religious work” of schools. And it is this kind of educational work that will serve to counteract the deleterious effects of neoliberal schooling. To understand how Dewey could claim the work of schools to be “religious work” this chapter will explore Dewey’s

\[^{171}\text{Ibid.}\]
understanding of the religious, how it is connected to his understanding of democratic community, and what that has to say about the important work of schools.

The construction of Dewey’s understanding of religion and the religious will focus exclusively on his public work on the subject while admittedly avoiding attempts at extended biography (see Appendix B for some clarification of Dewey’s terminology). Of course, his writings cannot be disconnected from the context of contemporary American Protestantism nor the influence of his conservative Christian upbringing. Rockefeller\textsuperscript{172} and Ryan\textsuperscript{173} have written extensively on Dewey’s formative years. Dewey was born in 1859 in Burlington, Vermont. Young Dewey’s early years were shaped most exclusively by his mother due to his father’s military involvement in the Civil War. His mother, Lucina, was a former Universalist turned Congregationalist whose personal faith became focused on individual piety, sin, and regeneration through faith in Jesus Christ. John Dewey was influenced by his mother to join the Congregational church when he was eleven. Her scrupulous tidiness in the area of religious conscience and behavior created a sense of guilt and irritation in young Dewey\textsuperscript{174} that may have been the source of his disparagement of the practice of analyzing religious feeling in his 1886 address to the Students’ Christian Association at the University of Michigan.\textsuperscript{175}

\textsuperscript{172} Rockefeller, \textit{John Dewey}.
\textsuperscript{173} Ryan and Child, \textit{John Dewey and the High Tide of American Liberalism}.
\textsuperscript{174} Rockefeller, \textit{John Dewey}, 38.
Dewey’s intellectual life developed in the wake of Western Christianity’s struggle to come to terms with the rise of science. Science began to tear itself away from the authority of the Christian cultural West from the late eighteen century to what could be seen as its completion in the mid-nineteenth century with the publication of Darwin’s *The Origin of Species by Natural Selection*. Philosophical and theological traditions, though varied in their specifics, found dualistic solutions to the ‘problem of science’ whereby the natural world of science and the supernatural world of religion could occupy separate, although to various degrees, interpenetrating realms. The main thrust of Dewey’s intellectual work was shaped by his attempt to bring unity to this dualistic notion of reality.

Although the influence of his mother, New England Congregationalism, and a host of early college professors rooted in the Christian tradition would forever shape Dewey’s moral and religious life, he would eventually break from Christian ‘membership’. After he left the University of Michigan for a new position at the University of Chicago in 1894 he did not forward his membership to another church. With few exceptions following his teachings before the Students’ Christian Association in Michigan, Dewey cloistered much of his thought concerning God and religious belief until after his teaching career had ended in 1930. The trajectory of his religious thought will be traced through his essays and major works from his first university position at the University of Michigan in 1884 to the publication of *A Common Faith* in 1934.
Four of Dewey’s addresses to the Students’ Christian Association at the University of Michigan were published in their journal *The Monthly Bulletin*. His first address was a short talk entitled *The Obligation to Knowledge of God* (1884). Though replete with religious language Dewey’s talk is less a theological testimonial than it is a statement about the nature of knowledge. It concerns the integration of knowledge as not simply a collection of facts for the intellect but as something that has force upon our will, our actions in the natural world having moral implications. “Knowledge, says Dewey, does not become real knowledge until the commands which it lays upon the will have been executed, and that knowledge cannot arise except as our feelings and desires are involved…”  

176 The accumulation of facts about the world or about God, knowledge of any kind, whether of science or of religious truth, is no knowledge at all unless it enters the realm of human activity. Knowledge of God is expressed in this sense not as an intellectual concept but a knowledge that requires moral action in the real world. The dualism of knowing and doing is one of many divisions that Dewey struggles against and sets out to unify throughout his personal and professional career.

His early attraction to Hegel’s synthesis helped Dewey resolve some of these dualisms, the core of which seems to have been a profoundly religious struggle. Hegelianism “supplied a demand for unification that was doubtless an intense emotional craving…” due to the “sense of divisions and separations that were, I suppose, borne in upon me as a consequence of a heritage of New England culture,

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divisions by way of isolation of self from the world, of soul from body, of nature from
God, brought a painful oppression—or, rather, they were an inward laceration.” 177

Reflecting back on his early philosophic career Dewey recalls a “trying personal
crisis” when his evolving philosophical convictions clashed with his traditional
religious beliefs. The resolution he found was not in the separation of philosophy and
religion into two separate spheres but the integration or adaptation of religious belief.

… any genuinely sound religious experience could and should adapt itself to whatever beliefs one found oneself intellectually entitled to hold…I have enough faith in the depth of the religious tendencies of men to believe that they will adapt themselves to any required intellectual change, and that it is futile (and likely to be dishonest) to forecast prematurely just what forms the religious interest will take as a final consequence of the great intellectual transformation that is going on. 178

As traditional religionists sought to insulate religion from what they perceived as an
erosion of faith within the contemporary intellectual ferment, Dewey saw an
opportunity for integration and unity.

Dewey’s essay the *Place of Religious Emotion* (1886) is steeped in the
language of traditional Christianity. Whatever Dewey may have been working on in
his own religious struggles and philosophy, his words here are thick and opaque with
the language of the church.

Religious feeling is unhealthy when it is watched and analyzed to see if it exists, if it is right, if it is growing. It is as fatal to be forever observing our own religious moods and experiences, as it is to pull up a

178 Ibid.
seed from the ground to see if it is growing. We must plant the seed and nourish it, and leave the rest where it belongs—to God. God, in all reverence, has no special interest in or concern for our own private feelings and experiences.\textsuperscript{179}

His address to the Students’ Christian Association works to counter what he saw as an overly individualistic kind of religious experience that envisioned faith as a progression of personal piety instead of an active life of service. A year earlier in \textit{The Church and Society}, he had written, “There can be no doubt that Protestant religion has tended to an extreme individualism, and in its reaction against political ecclesiasticism has largely abdicated its proper function as a social organization.”\textsuperscript{180} Dewey understands that the function of religion and the church is to unite humanity in active social relations. This function is, for Dewey, the great contribution of Christianity itself. In \textit{The Value of Historical Christianity} (1889) he develops a stronger theological statement that claims the very work and reality of God to be the unification of humanity. “God is neither a far-away Being, nor a mere philosophic conception by which to explain the world. He is the reality of our ordinary relations with one another in life. He is the bond of the family, the bond of society. He is love, the source of all growth, all sacrifice, and all unity.”\textsuperscript{181} The “historical force” of Christianity is found in its expression of unity by calling the individual to surrender isolated personal desires and take up the “common interests of humanity”. Dewey

\textsuperscript{181} Ibid., 532.
warns that the religious life often becomes a life separated from the realities of everyday interests and humanity. “The healthy religious life knows no separation of the religious from the secular…”\textsuperscript{182} There is the sense that Dewey is working to articulate the practical implications of an immanent God for a religious audience even as they are evolving concepts for himself. He speaks of God as a fact and force, the union of our everyday relations. Dewey works to establish that God is not a supernal remote being, yet awkwardly, in some sense still “being”. His use of the capitalized personal pronoun (Him, Himself) to refer to this force and union could be acquiescence to his Christian readers but may suggest some personal reticence within his evolving theology.

\textit{Reconstruction}, Dewey’s May 1894 address to the Students’ Christian Association is a call to action in the face of bewildering intellectual and social change. Dewey encourages his audience to recognize that change and reconstruction is indeed the nature of existence itself. As purposes and ideals become realized, new aims develop and move us toward the future. Christianity, and the church in particular, should be no exception to this natural condition of life. Dewey’s idea here is that the church, in the context of the emergence of the scientific method as the search for truth, must reconstruct itself. If the church is to be vital and relevant, if the individual is to develop an actionable faith “…it is necessary for the church to reconstruct its doctrines of revelation and inspiration, and for the individual to reconstruct, within his own

\textsuperscript{182} Ibid., 534.
religious life, his conception of what spiritual truth is and the nature of its authority over him." The church must not hold on to its monopoly, or its sense of monopoly over truth. Dewey claims that the function of the church has indeed been taken up by other social agencies that seek to bind all “together into one harmonious whole of sympathy and action.” The church for Dewey is “no longer to be the sole, or even the preeminent representative in the cause of righteousness and good-will on earth.”

In response to the existence of science as a “method of inquiry” and “the actual incarnation of truth in human experience” that it has brought to the broader social environment, Dewey urges his young Christians to take up a cooperative effort toward the same ideals. “The responsibility now upon us is to form our faith in the light of the most searching methods and known facts; it is to form that faith so that it shall be an efficient and present help to us in action, in the co-operative union with all men who are sincerely striving to help on the Kingdom of God on earth.” For Dewey the nature of truth and its relationship to humanity has changed due to the tremendously successful methods of science. Religion must reconstruct and find its new place on this shifted ground or face obsolescence. By 1910, in an address to the Philosophical Club at Columbia University, Dewey is less guarded concerning the future prospects of religion:

The root of the religious attitude of the future may lie immensely more in an improved state of science and of politics than in what have been termed

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184 Ibid., 100.
185 Ibid., 101.
186 Ibid., 103.
187 Ibid., 106.
religions. Doubtless there are certain constants, roughly speaking, in human nature. Doubtless these constants in their interaction with the natural and social environments have naturally produced, among other things, religions. But it would seem as if the "universal" was to be sought in these interactions rather than in any one isolated strain, psychological or metaphysical. If so, the democracy and the science, the art of to-day may be immensely more prophetic of the religion which we would have spread in the future than any phenomena we seek to isolate under the caption of religious phenomena.188

There seems to be a core of religious faith, which for Dewey is being passed from the hands of “religions” to the work of democracy and science and art. It is the tendency of religion to hold tightly to its traditional beliefs and practices tied to “all kinds of extraneous and harmful accretions”189 which the methods of science have now revealed. Dewey suggests that the survival of religions in the future calls for a releasing of its grip on the past and an openness to a broader social perspective on the expression of the religious attitude.

Perhaps the most famous of Dewey’s writings on religion is found in the 1934 publication of *A Common Faith*. I will focus on several important aspects of this writing but will also look at a somewhat earlier writing, *The Quest for Certainty*, published in 1929, exposes some of the foundational concepts that help to bring Dewey’s understanding of religion into greater focus. In *The Quest for Certainty* Dewey explores the roots of the division between and the preference for theory over

189 Ibid.
practice. Dewey asks, “What is the cause and the import of the sharp division between theory and practice? Why should the latter be disesteemed along with matter and the body?” Dewey argues that humanity’s quest for certainty is rooted in the perilous nature of life itself and humanity’s desire to transcend itself. Uncertainty promotes the desire to grasp onto those things which are free from the vicissitudes of change itself. Humanity “may grasp universal Being, and Being which is universal is fixed and immutable.” Dewey’s assertion reveals what is essentially his philosophy of religion. “Insecurity generates the quest for certainty” and the desire to control the precarious circumstances of living “diverted the search for security into irrelevant modes of practice, into rite and cult; thought was devoted to discovery of omens rather than of signs of what is to occur. Gradually there was differentiation of two realms, one higher, consisting of the powers which determine human destiny in all important affairs. With this religion was concerned.” With trust in higher powers humanity lost trust in itself. “Man's distrust of himself has caused him to desire to get beyond and above himself, in pure knowledge he has thought he could attain this self-transcendence. The quest to attain certain knowledge as a matter of special revelation or an appeal to ultimate reality is a religious as well as a philosophical problem which has played out in the traditional separations of mind and body, supernatural and natural, and theory and practice. These dualisms worked well historically until their confrontation with modern science. Dewey writes,

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191 Ibid., 254.
192 Ibid., 6–7.
according to the religious and philosophic tradition of Europe, the valid status of all the highest values, the good, true and beautiful, was bound up with their being properties of ultimate and supreme Being, namely, God. All went well as long as what passed for natural science gave no offence to this conception. Trouble began when science ceased to disclose in the objects of knowledge the possession of any such properties. Then some roundabout method had to be devised for substantiating them.”  

This “trouble” caused by the “offence” of modern science is what spurs Dewey’s search for a ‘common’ faith.

The unsettling effect of modern science on traditional religious ideas caused Dewey to reimagine the future of religion in American culture. According to Steven Rockefeller, Dewey saw that contemporary scientific and democratic revolutions were causing a transformation of the intellectual, moral, and social values of society. These transformations were troubling traditional religious ideas and expressions. Especially at risk, in light of scientific critique, was traditional religion’s connection to the supernatural. “Dewey concedes that the loss of belief in the supernatural and the emergence of new social values has created for many a real crisis.”  

Yet Dewey is unwilling to abandon religion altogether. He recognizes the social function of religious expression but rejects the conclusion that religious experience must be tied to beliefs about the supernatural. But if religious expression and the supernatural are uncoupled, what might this form of ‘religion’ take? Dewey is unsure. In The Quest for Certainty he writes, “It is not possible to set forth with any accuracy or completeness just what

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193 Ibid., 42–43.
194 Rockefeller, John Dewey, 263.
form religion would take… or just what would happen if it broke away from that quest for certitude in the face of peril and human weakness which has determined its historic and institutional career.”\textsuperscript{195} He does however admit that religion will have to release its long history of defensiveness surrounding its traditional doctrines of history and the physical world which continue to conflict with the findings of modern science.\textsuperscript{196}

Dewey’s unwillingness to articulate specifics is no surprise in light of his understanding of the evolving nature of society. Rockefeller claims Dewey is certain that whatever new forms religious expression will take it will evolve spontaneously from a culture that values democracy and experimentalism.\textsuperscript{197}

In the three short chapters of \textit{A Common Faith} Dewey addresses the nature of religious experience in the evolving culture. His clear purpose is to emancipate religious experience, or what is “genuinely religious” from the historical encumbrances of religious tradition, particularly its reliance upon a supernatural source, and ground it squarely within the natural world. In Chapter 1 Dewey explicates the differences between \textit{religion} as it appears historically and institutionally and the \textit{religious} as a form of experience. In Chapter 2 Dewey presents the object of faith as a function of human strivings toward an ideal instead of a religion based on loyalty to a supernatural Being. In Chapter 3 Dewey attempts to show that the emancipation of the

\textsuperscript{195} Dewey, \textit{The Quest For Certainty}, 305.
\textsuperscript{196} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{197} Rockefeller, \textit{John Dewey}, 264.
religious from its roots in supernaturalism will serve to give religious experience credibility and enhance society.

To make the distinction between *religion* and the *religious*, Dewey marks *religion* as “a special body of beliefs and practices having some kind of institutional organization.” He expresses the idea that due to the variety of interpretations and particularities of religious traditions there can be “no such thing as religion in general.” A religion will always have some particular organizational structure that is tied to historic practices and beliefs. These historic practices and beliefs are rooted in the social culture from which the religion grew. Religions have changed in the past, modifying their conceptions and actions in response to “unseen powers”. What, Dewey asks, is required of religions in our cultural moment? If religions are to have cultural relevance they will need to change their beliefs and practices that are tied to the social culture of the past and discover what is religious in the experiences of the present. The stubborn unwillingness of religions to cut their ties to outdated cultural conditions are the historical encumbrances that Dewey claims are smothering the ability to experience the religious quality within daily living. His sense of the *religious* does not have a necessary connection to any specific body of beliefs, practices, or institutions. “Any activity pursued in behalf of an ideal end against obstacles and in spite of threats of personal loss because of conviction of its general

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199 Ibid.
200 Ibid., 6.
201 Ibid., 10.
and enduring value is religious in quality."\textsuperscript{202} The \textit{religious} refers to the quality of an experience, how an experience functions as opposed to being dependent upon a particular cause.

To defend this distinction between experience and cause, Dewey offers a clarification. If one has a religious experience in close connection with a particular practice or belief it is often used as empirical evidence in support of the authenticity of that belief or practice. The experience is used as the basis for justifying the existence of the religious apparatus. This is not Dewey’s position. Dewey’s claim is that the religious experiences are interpreted within a “superimposed load” of a particular religion’s frame of reference.\textsuperscript{203} Other religions and those of no religion have similar experiences. Religious experience is not something that is separated from other kinds of experiences within the natural world where people experience beauty, unity and community. A religious experience has the function to bring about a unification, a reorientation, a unity of the person with the natural world. The religious quality of an experience is to effect a “better adjustment in life and its conditions, not the manner and cause of its production.”\textsuperscript{204} Dewey says that “if this function were rescued through emancipation from dependence upon those elements that constitute a religion, many individuals would find that experiences having the force of bringing about a better, deeper and enduring adjustment in life…occur frequently in connection with many

\textsuperscript{202} Ibid., 27.
\textsuperscript{203} Ibid., 12.
\textsuperscript{204} Ibid., 14.
significant moments of living.”[205] Here one can see the essence of what Dewey conceives of as religious, the “attitudes that lend deep and enduring support to the process of living.”[206] His vision of religious faith is faith not in the revelation of truths from a Supreme Being that stands outside the natural world, not faith in codified doctrines of moral truth established by organized religions. Religious faith for Dewey is faith in the human relational condition. “Faith in the continued disclosing of truth through directed cooperative human endeavor is more religious in quality than is any faith in a completed revelation.”[207] Important here for Dewey is the evolving nature of truth as opposed to absolute truth and the recognition that this disclosing of truth is a process of human endeavor as opposed to divine revelation.

The realm of human endeavor in the natural world is the site of faith and action. The interactions and interdependence of individuals and their natural environment, their sense of oneness and connection to natural processes is the essential religious attitude that makes up the “natural piety” that Dewey espouses. Natural piety is a unification of the self with the “Universe”, what Dewey sees as self in connection with all the circumstances of living. Natural piety has a religious quality of attitude because it has reverence for the way human beings strive together in a matrix of natural interdependence. “The essentially unreligious attitude is that which attributes human achievement and purpose to man in isolation from the world of

[205] Ibid., 14. (emphasis added).
[206] Ibid., 15.
[207] Ibid., 26.
physical nature and his fellows. The sense of the dignity of human nature is as religious as is the sense of awe and reverence when it rests upon a sense of human nature as a cooperating part of a larger whole.”

Human striving toward this unification of selves with the conditions of living is driven by “unseen powers” that propel us. Although religions have attributed this power to the existence of a being outside of nature, Dewey’s natural piety has faith in the power of human experience. “The idea of invisible powers would take on the meaning of all the conditions of nature and human association that support and deepen the sense of values…”

Between the conditions of our current existence and the hope of something better, a more unified existence, lies the power of the ideal to push us further along. “An unseen power controlling our destiny becomes the power of an ideal. All possibilities, as possibilities, are ideal in character. The artist, scientist, citizen, parent, as far as they are actuated by the spirit of their callings, are controlled by the unseen.”

Our ideals, Dewey claims, do not require “antecedently existing actualities” or connection to a supernatural author, but function to the degree that we apply human intelligence toward our desired ends.

The object of faith then is not adherence to the doctrinal beliefs, rites and rituals of institutional religions based on the revelation of a supernatural Being. This connection for Dewey had become untenable in modern society and indeed it had
weakened the force of religious experience. The object of faith suitable for a “common” faith is one that trusts in a cooperative human effort, centered in the very natural conditions of our lived experiences, which have the hope of propelling us forward. Dewey does not deny that it is the ideal that centers us. His focus however, places the origin of the ideal within the human matrix and upon the method by which we strive toward it. The advances of modern society have caused humans to be “habituated toward a new method and ideal: There is but one sure road of access to truth—the road of patient, cooperative inquiry operating by means of observation, experiment, record and controlled reflection.”

This natural experimental method is rooted in natural conditions not in supernatural Being. The experimental methods of science have unseated religion as the intellectual authority and basis of truth. It is not so much that religions cling to beliefs and practices rooted in the past, but that their method for justifying them, based on the authority and revelation of a being outside of nature. “The scientific-religious conflict ultimately is a conflict between allegiance to this method and allegiance to even an irreducible minimum of belief so fixed in advance that it can never be modified.” When religions continue to cling to and insulate their intellectual ideas from public inquiry, they become culturally irrelevant. Not recognizing and adapting to this revolutionary shift in the methods of inquiry has put religion on its heels, scrambling to find solid ground. Dewey senses that if religion

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212 Ibid., 32.  
213 Ibid., 39.
could relinquish its grip on doctrine and dogma it could find the religious force in the common elements of our natural human experience. Dewey explains:

What I have been criticizing is the identification of the ideal with a particular Being, especially when the identification makes necessary the conclusion that this being is outside of Nature, and what I have tried to show is that the ideal itself has its roots in natural conditions; it emerges when the imagination idealizes existence by laying hold of the possibilities offered to thought and action. There are values, goods, actually realized upon a natural basis—the goods of human association, of art and knowledge. The idealizing imagination seize upon the most precious things found in the climacteric moments of experience and projects them. We need no external criterion and guarantee for their goodness. They are had, they exist as good, and out of them we frame our ideal ends.\textsuperscript{214}

Our ideals have practical operative force and although they are born through our imaginative capacities, they are not ephemeral. “They are made out of the hard stuff of the world of physical and social experience.”\textsuperscript{215} Dewey describes an ongoing natural experimental process where we continually imagine new possibilities which, once realized, become the stepping stones for new action toward another ideal. Each step requires creativity, intelligence, thought and experimentation.

This interactive, relational process wherein humans strive between the ideal and the actual in the natural world is where Dewey locates the divine. “It is this \textit{active} relation between ideal and actual to which I would give the name “God.’’”\textsuperscript{216} John

\begin{footnotes}
\item[214] Ibid., 48. (emphasis original).
\item[215] Ibid., 49.
\item[216] Ibid., 51. (emphasis original).
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Shook asserts Dewey’s comfort with the application of “God as a label for the organic unity of human strivings with cooperating natural forces.”\textsuperscript{217} The unity Dewey identifies is a dynamic force in human experience. “But the function of such a working union of the ideal and actual seems to me to be identical with the force that has in fact been attached to the conception of God in all the religions.”\textsuperscript{218} Shook connects Dewey to the liberal Protestant theology of his time that claimed the essential moral nature of religious doctrines and their function to shape the society’s moral expectations. Pragmatists, says Shook, would have “little quarrel” with the social functions of religion as long as they did not move beyond this moral responsibility.\textsuperscript{219} In recognizing the function of religious experience, Pragmatists could rescue religion from its crisis with science and reclaim the power and possibilities of the religious quality of life. Dewey, though he seems ambivalent about saving the name “God”, is not interested in rescuing religion. He is concerned with rescuing religious values, character, and attitude from religion. Religions can fall away, according to Dewey. In fact, they must in order that the religious in our everyday experience might flourish. “What I have tried to show is that this change is not fatal to religious values in our common experience, however adverse its impact may be on historic religions.”\textsuperscript{220} For the religious to survive it must be liberated from the supernatural “God” of religion.

\textsuperscript{218} Dewey, A Common Faith, 52. (emphasis original).
\textsuperscript{219} Shook, “John Dewey and Edward Scribner Ames,” 188.
\textsuperscript{220} Dewey, A Common Faith, 56.
In the concluding chapter of *A Common Faith* Dewey reiterates much of what he has said before. The growth of knowledge in the natural sciences in particular, has rendered traditional religions’ connection to the supernatural untenable. In fact, Dewey claims, traditional belief in a supernatural being is now hindering our progress as a society as it faces the challenges of change. It causes us to wait around for God to act instead of acting ourselves. “The objection to supernaturalism is that it stands in the way of an effective realization of the sweep and depth of the implications of natural human relations. It stands in the way of using the means that are in our power to make radical changes in these relations.”

What is needed is to free the power of faith from its supernatural framework that divides and hinders the progress of humanity and take up a “common” faith rooted in the power of human communal striving.

Faith in the power of human striving accords with Dewey’s understanding of the democratic way of associated living. Indeed, for Dewey, they may be synonymous. A return to the moral ideals found in the religions, particularly American Protestantism, would tie the religious and civic life together in the democratic way. Shook’s work to compare the religious naturalism of Edward Ames and Dewey confirms this organic connection by claiming that:

> these two philosophers believed that Protestant liberalism must be transformed. Protestant liberalism must refocus on its core moral commitments, starting with the Enlightenment commitments of equal liberty and opportunity for all. This moral ideal of universal liberty and opportunity is the foundation for, and justification of, democracy. By

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221 Ibid., 80.
demanding that religion in America become compatible with democracy, these pragmatists believed that they were doing nothing more than asking that Christianity return to its true nature. 222

But the return of religion to its core commitments would not, for Dewey, lead to the kind of ‘associated living’ which democracy envisioned. If “every religion has its source in the social and intellectual life of a community or race,” 223 then “[t]he sense of wholeness which is urged as the essence of religion can be built up and sustained only through membership in a society which has attained a degree of unity.” 224 For Dewey, a truly democratic society would breed the ways of ‘associated living’ that would be religious in nature.

If the concept of democracy is intertwined with Protestantism in the sense that it promoted the “priesthood of all believers” then Dewey’s critique of religion and his implicit anti-Catholicism could be interpreted as the promotion of another form of Protestantism. However, Christianity in its traditional historical expression is anti-democratic in its claims to one truth, separation of believers from non-believers, etc. Dewey claims that Christianity as a doctrinally based religion should jettison its claims to truth and take up a more democratic role alongside other social agencies in the shaping of a better society. Dewey may sound as if he is taking up traditional animosities between Catholicism and Protestantism but he is critical of all religions or

223 Ibid., 195.
224 Ibid., 191.
philosophies for that matter that propose superior preexistent truth. Democracy is the ‘common faith’, not a particular religion. The question of whether democracy requires secularization or westernization is different and more complex. Can a democratic society based on religion exist? Can there be a democratic Christian society? Can there be a democratic Islamic society? How are the issues of divine sovereignty and popular sovereignty reconciled? These questions go beyond the scope of this project.

Dewey recognized that the integrating promise of religion had been lost. Religion, if not simply a private affair, was irreparably divided into denominations and sects which placed their loyalty in doctrines based on metaphysical commitments. Religion as a private concern was focused too heavily on the condition of the individual soul, hoping that whole individuals would establish a whole society.

Religion is not so much a root of unity as it is its flower or fruit. The very attempt to secure integration for the individual, and through him for society, by means of a deliberate and conscious cultivation of religion, is itself proof of how far the individual has become lost through detachment from acknowledged social values. It is no wonder that when the appeal does not take the form of dogmatic fundamentalism, it tends to terminate in either some form of esoteric occultism or private estheticism. The sense of wholeness which is urged as the essence of religion can be built up and sustained only through membership in a society which has attained a degree of unity. The attempt to cultivate it first in individuals and then extend it to form an organically unified society is fantasy.\(^{225}\)

\(^{225}\) Dewey, *Individualism Old and New*, 64.
The ideal of social unity as collective imaginative striving will then work to shape individuals who live and interact within such community life.

To claim that Dewey’s vision of a democratic society is purely secular in its application is to misunderstand Dewey. Indeed, as shown above, Dewey rejected the dualisms inherent in bifurcations of the world into realms of the secular and the religious. This is important because Dewey’s own quest for unity would urge him toward a philosophy that would seek to reconcile the growing tension between traditional religion and science. However, as Daniel Trohler reminds us, the discourse of moderate Protestantism was one that envisioned American democratic progress as the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth. Social life was infused with a religious understanding that undogmatically, at least among liberal religious thinkers, claimed the blessings of democracy as a way to usher in the kingdom.226 There was much hope that the application of emerging social sciences and technological advances along with Christian ideals could culminate in a more democratic society. *Christianity and Democracy*, a publication early in his career at the University of Michigan (1893) suggests that Dewey saw democracy as the newest channel for the progression of religious truth. Dewey claims that religion loses its groundedness in the world and its surroundings, its social and intellectual significance, when its acts and ideals are “condensed in the symbols, the rites, the dogmas…”227 Here Dewey sees truth as a revelation that “must continue as long as life has new meanings to unfold,

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new action to propose.” 228 When the church’s claim to truth becomes exclusive, monopolizing its influence around some fixed and time bound set of doctrines it ceases to be revelatory. What is true, what is revelation, will break out of any organization that tries to contain it. Dewey claims that “…real Christianity is now working outside of and beyond the organization, that the revelation is going on in wider and freer channels.” 229 The rising of science as truth has been one of those “wider and freer channels” that the church in its assumed guardianship has fought to contain. But “revelation could not be interrupted on account of the faithlessness of the church, it pushed out in the new channel.” 230 The facilitator of truth, once the work of the church, is now found in the work of democracy.

Democracy is freedom. If truth is at the bottom of things, freedom means giving this truth a chance to show itself, a chance to well up from the depths. Democracy, as freedom, means the loosening of bonds, the wearing away of restrictions, the breaking down of barriers, of middle walls, of partitions. Through this doing away with restrictions, whatever truth, whatever reality there is in man's life is freed to express itself. Democracy is, as freedom, the freeing of truth. Truth makes free, but it has been the work of history to free truth—to break down the walls of isolation and of class interest which held it in and under. 231

The work of democracy is to bring about unification which is an expression of the Kingdom of God:

228 Ibid., 5.
229 Ibid.
230 Ibid., 6.
231 Ibid., 8.
The spiritual unification of humanity, the realization of the brotherhood of man, all that Christ called the Kingdom of God is but the further expression of this freedom of truth. The truth is not fully freed when it gets into some individual's consciousness, for him to delectate himself with. It is freed only when it moves in and through this favored individual to his fellows; when the truth which comes to consciousness in one, extends and distributes itself to all so that it becomes the Common-wealth, the Republic, the public affair. The walls broken down by the freedom which is democracy, are all the walls preventing the complete movement of truth. It is in the community of truth thus established that the brotherhood, which is democracy, has its being.\(^{232}\)

Democracy thus appears as the means by which the revelation of truth is carried on. It is in democracy, the community of ideas and interest through community of action, that the incarnation of God in man (man, that is to say, as organ of universal truth) becomes a living, present thing, having its ordinary and natural sense. This truth is brought down to life; its segregation removed; it is made a common truth enacted in all departments of action, not in one isolated sphere called religious.\(^{233}\)

For Dewey, the dualisms of religious and secular, God and man, the supernatural and natural, are dissolved in the work of democracy.

Wide-sweeping forces of change effected economic, political and intellectual conditions and confronted society and the church with profound theological problems.\(^{234}\) The traditional beliefs of Christianity were being questioned in the growing light of the new sciences of psychology, historical research, studies in comparative religion, and Darwin’s evolutionary biology. Though some, confronted

\(^{232}\) Ibid., 8–9.
\(^{233}\) Ibid., 9.
\(^{234}\) Rockefeller, John Dewey, 125.
with these emerging ideas, left the church, many remained to struggle to find a way to merge the new ideas and ways of thinking with their Christian faith. There was much optimism due to the great advances of the industrial revolution and the growth of a middle class, yet many recognized the growing inequality and poverty particularly in urban areas. The Social Gospel movement found its place in this nexus of the breakdown of traditional Christian beliefs and the awareness of the need to respond to the needs of the urban poor. The new ideas of the sciences were not necessarily opposed to Christian belief as if one had to choose between Christianity and Darwinism. “To be liberal meant a lack of concern about dogmas, like original sin, and this opened up the possibility of thinking and acting in a scientific and modern way and, at the same time, in a Christian way.”

Christian liberals within the Social Gospel movement rejected strict doctrinal teachings and focused on the reformation of social conditions. Members of the movement “shared in a widespread social belief in progress. For them realization of the kingdom of God on earth was a real hope and inspiration.” The emerging shift concerned the finding of ‘salvation’ in the transformation of a this-world society instead of focusing on saving individual souls in preparation for another. There was the sense that just as the discoveries of science were at work to help us understand and control the physical world so too would the methods of science help in understanding and solving the social problems plaguing humanity.

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236 Rockefeller, John Dewey, 127.
Dewey hints at the optimism of this former time in his 1944 paper *The Democratic Faith and Education*.

The ardent and hopeful social idealist of the last century or so…[believed] that the revolution which was taking place in commerce and communication would break down the barriers which had kept the peoples of the earth alien and hostile and would create a state of interdependence which in time would insure lasting peace…belief that a general development of enlightenment and rationality was bound to follow the increase in knowledge and the diffusion which would result from the revolution in science that was taking place. Since it had long been held that rationality and freedom were intimately allied, it was held that the movement toward democratic institutions and popular government which had produced in succession the British, American, and French Revolutions was bound to spread until freedom and equality were the foundations of political government in every country of the globe….the spread of enlightenment and democratic institutions would produce a gradual but assured withering away of the powers of the political state. Freedom was supposed to be so deeply rooted in the very nature of men that given the spread of rational enlightenment it would take care of itself with only a minimum of political action confined to insuring external police order … the vast, the almost incalculable increase in productivity resulting from the industrial revolution was bound to raise the general standard of living to a point where extreme poverty would be practically eliminated. It was believed that the opportunity to lead a decent, self-respecting because self-sufficient, economic life would be assured…

On the other side of two wars, Dewey recognized the failure of such idealism.

However, Dewey was still optimistic. His optimism was rooted not in idealistic notions of the inevitability of social progress. His optimism was grounded in his uniquely American pragmatic philosophy. Raymond Boisvert’s study suggests that Dewey struggled with the misconceptions in his articulation of his philosophy in

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reference to the Pragmatism of Charles Peirce and William James.\(^{238}\) Pragmatism, says Clarence Karier,

with its rejection of metaphysical absolutes, utopias, and ultimate truths, its stress on the possible in an evolving pluralistic society, and its application of rational intelligence to the process of social amelioration, tended to be the intellectual bridge across which many Americans passed from a closed Newtonian universe to a twentieth-century open-ended world view.\(^{239}\)

An open-ended universe meant that inevitable progress toward (or demise from) some ideal was not assured. The circumstances of this unsure universe required the application of the best methods of science to our human condition in hopes of betterment. In their opposition to the classical spectator theory of knowledge, the Pragmatists reconstructed former German and British theories of experience. Rockefeller claims that Dewey’s ‘pragmatism’ provided the basis for a “sound method of moral valuation for a rapidly changing world—a method that harnesses the scientific method to serve humanity’s ethical and social life. In other words, Dewey conceived his [pragmatism] as an experimental method for guiding and transforming the interactions of human beings with their world.”\(^{240}\) Boisvert recognized Dewey’s human interactional approach to the way Dewey conceived of the place of philosophical reflection. It necessarily emerges from “the muddled, ambiguous, lived present. Deweyan philosophy is a philosophy for humans, embodied individuals

\(^{238}\) Boisvert, John Dewey, 11.
\(^{239}\) Karier, The Individual, Society, and Education, 124.
\(^{240}\) Rockefeller, John Dewey, 224.
endowed with intelligence.” Dewey had great hope that the application of human intelligence through the methods of science would bring positive social development.

Rooted in a ‘philosophy for humans’ Dewey would not look to ideal notions of human potential or the ‘natural’ progression of industrial powers for solving the problems of society. He asked what would happen “if we recognize that the responsibility for creating a state of peace internationally and of freedom and economic security internally has to be carried by deliberate cooperative human effort?” Too much faith in cosmic forces and a trust in our technological success had led us to misunderstand our role in the formation of a truly democratic society. The same methods that have been used in the expansion of our knowledge of the physical world have not been applied to our knowledge of the world of human relations. The lesson, Dewey says, “is that human attitudes and efforts are the strategic center for promotion of the generous aims of peace among nations; promotion of economic security; the use of political means in order to advance freedom and equality; and the worldwide cause of democratic institutions.” Our attitudes and efforts to cooperate as a human community offers the greatest potential for a sustaining democratic society that nurtures its own evolution.

John Dewey’s understanding of democracy and a democratic society is not conceived as a pristine concept from ‘on high’ that finds its application in the world.

241 Boisvert, John Dewey, 10–11.
243 Ibid.
Democracy, for Dewey is not a reality that simply happens naturally as humans and human communities become more enlightened and rational in their ways of being. It is not the natural progression of our industrial productivity and material wealth. Indeed, we do not drift into democracy due to the nature of our intelligence nor the increase in our productivity. Democracy does not come about simply because we grow more enlightened or because we are more industrious. Democracy, for Dewey, is bound up within our human relationships that require continual struggle and continual participation with insight, foresight, and planning. The best methods of science that are used to apply to the physical world are to be used in the understanding of human relationships. “…[H]uman attitudes and efforts are the strategic center.”

What is needed, Dewey claims, is the application of “cooperative human effort.” After all, “a democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience.” This prospective way of living, Dewey contends, requires education. Simple faith in democracy to work its natural way into the world is a blind faith. Democracy is necessarily realized in the realm of human participation and interaction with the application of the methods of science. “For Dewey, says Jim Garrison, “humanity was a participant in an unfinished universe rather than a spectator of a finished one. In order to survive and exalt our existence,

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244 Ibid.
245 Ibid., 276.
246 Dewey, Democracy and Education, 100.
we must creatively solve our problems and evolve life-affirming values, perhaps of a kind that have never before existed.\textsuperscript{247}

In \textit{Democracy and Education}, Dewey argued that when democracy is conceived as “associated living” it provides the opportunity for the conditions of the good society. The desirable society should have “not only more numerous and more varied points of shared common interest, but greater reliance upon the recognition of mutual interests” and “not only freer interaction between social groups (once isolated so far as intention could keep up a separation) but change in social habit—its continuous readjustment through meeting the new situations produced by varied intercourse.”\textsuperscript{248} Dewey envisions this mode of living as one in which participation includes a consciousness of vital relationships with others. In these vital relationships individuals and groups are conscious of the needs and concerns of one another in relation to their own needs and concerns. He later clarifies,

The two points selected by which to measure the worth of a form of social life are the extent in which the interests of a group are shared by all its members, and the fullness and freedom with which it interacts with other groups. An undesirable society, in other words, is one which internally and externally sets up barriers to free intercourse and communication of experience. A society which makes provision for participation in its good of all its members on equal terms and which secures flexible readjustment of its institutions through interaction of the different forms of associated life is in so far democratic.\textsuperscript{249}

\textsuperscript{248} Dewey, \textit{Democracy and Education}, 100.
\textsuperscript{249} Ibid., 115.
This ‘flexible’ interaction assumes a dynamic relationship, one that is continually changing and evolving to meet ever changing conditions within the environment.

It is clear that Dewey breaks from the view that conceives of society as a mere collection of discrete individuals. Boisvert calls Dewey’s conception of society “cellular”. It moves away from the Newtonian atomistic view of individuals living self-contained lives, to a sense of societies within society where “the ultimate constituents, like cells, are themselves composite and porous to the surrounding environment.”

Dewey envisioned an all-inclusive form of democratic living that would penetrate into every aspect of life. “The clear consciousness of a communal life, in all its implications, constitutes the idea of democracy.” The kind of associated living which Dewey envisioned had a robust sense of what he called “communicated experience”. Dewey writes,

Men live in a community in virtue of the things which they have in common; and communication is the way in which they come to possess things in common. What they must have in common in order to form a community or society are aims, beliefs, aspirations, knowledge--a common understanding… The communication which ensures participation in a common understanding is one which secures similar emotional and intellectual dispositions--like ways of responding to expectations and requirements.

This vital sense of democratic living requires that citizens recognize and live consciously in community with others, knowing the demands of a network of needs.

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250 Boisvert, John Dewey, 54.
252 Dewey, Democracy and Education, 5.
and concerns and responding in ways that honors those needs. Democracy in this ‘vital’ sense is not a static goal which stands outside the community, but a way of living that responds and evolves within the dynamic of human relationships. In a conception where the social conditions and roles are fixed and partitioned, where individuals are separate entities, democracy is not vital. Yet ‘associated living’ expands

the number of individuals who participate in an interest so that each has to refer his own action to that of others, and to consider the action of others to give point and direction to his own, is equivalent to the breaking down of those barriers of class, race, and national territory which kept men from perceiving the full import of their activity. These more numerous and more varied points of contact denote a greater diversity of stimuli to which an individual has to respond; they consequently put a premium on variation in his action. 253

Such a way of life would not only exclude historic divisions of class but also social divisions based on vocation. “There is nothing whatever inherent in the occupations that are socially necessary and useful to divide them into those which are ‘learned’ professions and those which are menial, servile, and illiberal. As far as such a separation exists in fact it is an inheritance from the earlier class structure of human relations. It is a denial of democracy.”254 Dewey’s emphasis upon community is derived from his understanding of the individual as a product of social relationships and interactions. “To learn to be human, says Dewey, is to develop through the give-

253 Ibid., 101.
and-take of communication an effective sense of being an individually distinctive member of a community.”\textsuperscript{255} What it means to be human is formulated in the social interactions by which individuals contribute to and gain from the interests and activities of the larger community to which they belong. Individuality develops as social relationships deepen and interests and common goals are shared.

The community which Dewey envisions is synonymous with his understanding of democracy. “[D]emocracy is not an alternative to other principles of associated life. It is the idea of community life itself. The clear consciousness of a communal life, in all its implications, constitutes the idea of democracy.”\textsuperscript{256} As a mere system of government, democracy, Dewey claims, is void of life until the idea of democracy can be “incarnated” within human social relationships. This distinction between the social idea of democracy and the political system of government allows Dewey to reveal that all human associations and interactions are concerned with the formation of community to which the political system is a mere conduit for its realization. Dewey’s larger concern is the waning nature of the \textit{public} in the midst of the growth of America’s industrial strength. The great success of industrialization and capitalization has brought about the breakdown of community relationships, individualized persons and driven wedges between classes. These separations work against the formation of community and therefore the possibility of democratic life. Broad associations do more than simply place persons in physical proximity. Community associations work

\textsuperscript{256} Ibid., 328.
on an emotional level that bring the Public into being. “Associated or joint activity is a condition of the creation of a community. But association itself is physical and organic, while communal life is moral, that is emotionally, intellectually, consciously sustained.”

The Great Society, claims Dewey, is simply a collection of groups until it can breathe deeply the full ramifications of associated living. Then it will become the Great Community and live into its full potential which is democracy itself. “Democracy will come into its own, for democracy is a name for a life of free and enriching communion.”

Dewey recognizes that the democratic way of life is a challenge. “Democracy is not an easy road to take and follow” and will require that we work together as a community to use “the best available methods to procure a social knowledge that is reasonably commensurate with our physical knowledge.” The best use of our methods of procuring the knowledge of nature and our physical world should be used in working together as a human community to solve the ongoing problems of an evolving society. Living with the consciousness of community with a variety of communicated interests is “cellular” as individuals and groups become “porous” toward one another.

How might this hard work of democracy be accomplished within a society? Dewey’s answer is education. If we truly recognize that we have a responsibility as

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257 Ibid., 330.
258 Ibid., 351.
humans to apply the “best available methods” to the hard work of sustaining a
democratic way of living, then education becomes the means for such work. This work
“carries with it the basic importance of education in creating the habits and the outlook
that are able and eager to secure the ends of peace, democracy and economic
stability.”
Indeed the very form of education which a society conceives is directly
tied to the conception of the society itself. Dewey said that “The conception of
education as a social process and function has no definite meaning until we define the
kind of society we have in mind.”
A society that is stratified into classes would
structure their educational opportunities so as to attend to the maintenance of separate
classes. A democratically conceived society would form its educational opportunities
toward the aim of educating citizens for democratic participation in the society.

In a broad sense, a variety of social experiences can constitute education.

Education is the result of the communication of social life. Dewey explains that the
communication of social life is itself an educative experience. Whenever there is
communication there is a transformation of experience. Persons participate in an
exchange of experience that is communicated by an artful process of assimilation that
requires the communicator to step outside their own experience in order to see it from
the other’s perspective. For communication to occur, the experience must have shared
points of interest for the communicators.

Except in dealing with commonplaces and catch phrases one has to
assimilate, imaginatively, something of another's experience in order to

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260 Ibid., 280.
261 Dewey, Democracy and Education, 112.
tell him intelligently of one's own experience. All communication is like art. It may be fairly said, therefore, that any social arrangement that remains vitally social, or vitally shared, is educative to those who participate in it. 262

These educative social arrangements become the primary way in which a society forms and reforms itself toward its desired ends. “Through education, says Dewey, “society can formulate its own purposes, can organize its own means and resources, and thus shape itself with definiteness and economy in the direction in which it wishes to move.” 263 These educative social exchanges take place in the home, at work, or in a number of social institutions.

From Dewey’s perspective however, the school, as an institution is in a special position to provide opportunities for the art of communicating in an educative way. He claims that the school “is primarily a social institution. Education being a social process, the school is simply that form of community life in which all those agencies are concentrated that will be most effective in bringing the child to share in the inherited resources of the race, and to use his own powers for social ends.” 264 This concentration of the aspects of community life gives the school its special power as the “primary and most effective instrument of social progress and reform.” 265 In complex societies schools take on part of the educative function that was once

262 Ibid., 6–7. (emphasis added).
264 Ibid., 7. (emphasis added).
265 Ibid., 18.
provided only by home and family. When the complexity of the “inherited resources of the race” grows beyond the boundaries of familial concreteness, communities rely on schools to concentrate and transmit these resources to its younger members.  

Dewey makes this strong claim in *The School and Society*, that “[a]ll that society has accomplished for itself is put, through the agency of the school, at the disposal of its future members. All its better thoughts of itself it hopes to realize through the new possibilities thus opened to its future self.”  

For Dewey, the school is the concentrated center for social development.  

As the site for social development, the school has moral and ethical responsibilities to the child and the society far beyond the mere training of law abiding, voting citizens. Insofar as the school is social, it has moral purpose. The school must take on the task of developing the well-rounded member of society, one who is able to “recognize all his social relations and take his part in sustaining them.” This recognition of social relations takes place within a school that “reproduces, within itself, typical conditions of social life” without isolating itself from the broader society. The school must not be seen as a place to prepare for some future participatory life outside of the school, but as a living community in and of itself. “The only way, says Dewey, to prepare for social life is to engage in social life.” The engagement in real life social conditions within a community is what will

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269 Ibid., 272.  
270 Ibid.
sustain a democratic society. When the school, in all of its curricular endeavors, seeks
to focus on the social function of its existence, it engenders within individuals a
“heightened emotional appreciation” for community interests and an “understanding
of social responsibilities” within the community.\textsuperscript{271} The various processes within the
school, from its curriculum to its instructional methods, should reflect the
consciousness of its social function within the community. “Education should create
an interest in all persons in furthering the general good, so that they will find their own
happiness realized in what they can do to improve the conditions of others.”\textsuperscript{272} This
kind of social consciousness for the individual within the school links the moral work
of education with the ideals democracy. For Dewey, the unresolved concern of
democracy is establishing educational opportunities that will engender “that kind of
individuality which is intelligently alive to the common life and sensitively loyal to its
common maintenance.”\textsuperscript{273}

In \textit{Democracy and Education}, Dewey outlines three functions of the school in
its task of concentrating and transmitting these social resources. Considering the depth
and complexity of a civilization’s social heritage, Dewey, says that the school should
provide a “simplified environment”. The school is to present a selection of social
relationships, simple at first, and then progressively more complex so that children can
grow to share in them and come to understand them.\textsuperscript{274} What children do in schools,

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\textsuperscript{271} Dewey, \textit{The Middle Works of John Dewey, Volume 11, 1899 - 1924}, 57.  \\
\textsuperscript{272} Dewey, \textit{The Later Works of John Dewey, Volume 7}, 1925 - 1953, 243.  \\
\textsuperscript{273} Dewey, \textit{The Middle Works of John Dewey, Volume 11, 1899 - 1924}, 57.  \\
\textsuperscript{274} Dewey, \textit{Democracy and Education}, 23–24.
\end{flushright}
their “occupations” are conceived in terms of their social import for the society as a whole. The “primal necessities of community life” are to be developed in the school. Dewey understands that the school should be an “embryonic” form of community life.\textsuperscript{275} The school should be a place where children are part of a community and therefore learn \textit{living} in a community “instead of being only a place to learn lessons having an abstract and remote reference to some possible living to be done in the future.”\textsuperscript{276} When children are saturated with the full range of authentic community living experiences within the school they promote the best possibility for having this kind of community life within the larger society.

The second function of the school is to provide a “purified medium of action”. Here Dewey claims the duty of the school is to “weed out” the “dead wood” of society’s past perversities and in an effort to counteract the influence of these “unworthy features” select what will contribute to a better society.\textsuperscript{277} Whether the school is to simply ignore the undesirable qualities of its social history is a bit ambiguous. However, a broader sense of Dewey’s concern for the experimental nature of working to solve social problems may suggest that what is to be transmitted in the school setting are those qualities of social living that have been demonstrated over time to enhance society. The school is to filter and “counteract” the influence of society’s worst features and “reinforce the power of [the] best”.\textsuperscript{278}

\textsuperscript{275} Dewey, \textit{The School and Society}, 27.  
\textsuperscript{276} Ibid., 12.  
\textsuperscript{277} Dewey, \textit{Democracy and Education}, 24.  
\textsuperscript{278} Ibid., 97.
Dewey claims that the third function of the school is to offer an environment that will “balance the various elements of the social environment.” The mobility of modern industrial society has broken down geographic barriers and placed various social and ethnic groups into close proximity. As individual students from various social groups come together in the school setting and form their little community, they are expanded in their social experiences. “The intermingling in the school of youth of different races, differing religions, and unlike customs creates for all a new and broader environment.”\textsuperscript{279} The school takes on an assimilating force, helping students to balance and coordinate their social commitments for use in the larger social setting. Though Dewey says that the school should offer “something like a homogeneous and balanced environment for the young,”\textsuperscript{280} it is unlikely that he envisions a kind of social uniformity that is insensitive to diversity. He sees the school as a community where students from various social groups can escape the limitations of their own social upbringing by broadening their perspectives. This allows a society to see farther and wider together. For all of the forces of difference that tend to pull social groups apart, the school functions to hold them together.

The school, in living up to these social functions, remains for Dewey the best hope for realizing his social vision. He writes, “When the school introduces and trains each child of society into membership within such a little community, saturating him with the spirit of service, and providing him with the instruments of effective self-

\textsuperscript{279} Ibid., 25–26.
\textsuperscript{280} Ibid., 25.
direction, we shall have the deepest and best guaranty of a larger society which is
worthy, lovely, and harmonious."281 Dewey wants the school to be, not an integral
part of the community, but, the integrating part of the community. The school should
be designed as an integrating force for the community, not as some isolated aspect of
community life.282 He takes this vision from the example he encountered in the work
of Jane Addams’ Hull House. There “ideas are incarnated in human form and clothed
with the winning grace of personal life. Classes…are regarded as modes of bringing
people together, of doing away with barriers of caste, or class, or race, or type of
experience that keep people from real communion with each other.”283 This is the role
of the school as a community of human beings concerned with the development of
community. The school should be a sharing of the intellect and the spirit. For Dewey,
to “extend the range and the fullness of sharing in the intellectual and spiritual
resources of the community is the very meaning of the community.”284 A variety of
classes for intellectual and skills development can be provided, but the significance of
these developments cannot be limited to their instrumental value for the economy nor
even their contribution to the political machinery of the state. “We must conceive of
them, Dewey says, in their social significance, as types of the processes by which
society keeps itself going, as agencies for bringing home to the child some of the
primal necessities of community life.”285 Through the lens of community, the school is

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283 Ibid., 91.
284 Ibid., 93.
not merely as place where children learn lessons important for their future but because the spirit of the school is community, they learn a wholeness, a unity that is life itself.

For Dewey, the best incubator to bring about this ‘wholeness’ of community life is not the traditional church, which gets sidetracked with divisive doctrinal beliefs, but the school in its social function. The schools in their social function to bring about unity are simultaneously living out a religious function. Dewey writes that “schools, in bringing together those of different nationalities, languages, traditions, and creeds, in assimilating them together upon the basis of what is common and public in endeavor and achievement, are performing an infinitely significant religious work. They are promoting the social unit out of which in the end genuine religious unity must grow.”

The school’s function to form society, the school as “the primary and most effective instrument of social progress and reform” is, from Dewey’s understanding, a religious function.

The elements of Dewey’s argument in the 1908 article Religion and Our Schools, bring together his understanding of the religious and his understanding of the social function of the schools. To begin, Dewey recognizes that the rise and development of science has brought about the “greatest intellectual readjustment” in history. Well aware of the losses incurred in the midst of such uncertain times, particularly the those of traditional religion, Dewey is careful not to offer solace in a

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return to old ideas nor does he prescribe a particular future. He calls for a patient
perseverance and a continued laboring toward a time of clarification when education
will form the “habits of mind congruous with democracy and with science.”

Until then, until the old ideas and symbols of religion have been reconstructed and the ideas
of science and democracy have come to clarification, the schools should do nothing in
terms of including religion. “…better that our schools should do nothing than that they
should do wrong things.”

The second element of his argument against the inclusion of religion in schools
is the recognition that the United States has developed a state consciousness that
guides our sense of fairness in the sense that the whole is more important than any one
part. “This nation was born under conditions which enabled it to share in and to
appropriate the idea that the state life, the vitality of the social whole, is of more
importance than the flourishing of any segment or class.”

The separation of church and state argument is in actuality, for Dewey, an argument of state over religion. Here
Dewey argues that our state consciousness limits our ability to place one particular
religious faction over another. State integrity should be maintained against divisive
social groups. If we insist on religion in the schools, Dewey asks, which religion
should be taught? And if we confine our view to Christianity, which form? Which
tradition? State consciousness requires that no one tradition should supersede others.

289 Ibid.
290 Ibid., 169.
Dewey perceives that the methods of science are gaining influence but still have not quite tipped the balance toward a pervasive “habit of mind.” The third element of his argument claims that the conditions of how we come to know have changed. The methods of science place knowledge under public and impartial scrutiny that move us away from the dogmatic, private knowledge of religion. “All proffered samples of learning must go to the same assay-room and be subjected to common tests. It is the essence of all dogmatic faiths to hold that any such "show-down" is sacrilegious and perverse.”²⁹¹ Religions will be unwilling to expose their doctrine to the methods of free inquiry and moreover develop in their adherents the kind of scientific ways of knowing that are contrary to traditional religious ways of knowing.

A further complication and the fourth element of Dewey’s argument concerns the proper teachers needed for such religious teaching. “It is one thing to be fairly or even exceptionally virtuous; it is another thing to command the conditions and the qualifications for successful importation of virtue to others.”²⁹² What kind of teacher would this endeavor require? A theologian? A historian of religion? Dewey wonders if the kind of expert needed would not simply aim toward a particular discipline or catechism. This, says Dewey, is “the crux of the whole matter.”²⁹³ It is the nature of religions to separate and divide into factions. “Is religion a thing so specialized, so technical, so "informational" that, like geography or history or grammar, it may be

²⁹¹ Ibid., 173–74.
²⁹² Ibid., 174.
²⁹³ Ibid.
taught at special hours, times, and places by those who have properly "got it up," and been approved as persons of fit character and adequate professional training?"²⁹⁴ Separating students out to various denominational teachers to be taught their respective beliefs only serves to continue the discrediting divisions of institutional religion.

Dewey’s argument against the inclusion of religion in schools culminates by drawing upon his understanding that indeed schools serve the function of social unification, which for Dewey is the primary function of religious experience. The introduction of divisive religious factions would only work against the unifying work of the school. Dewey’s view is clear in that “schools serve best the cause of religion in serving the cause of social unification; and that under certain conditions schools are more religious in substance and in promise without any of the conventional badges and machinery of religious instruction than they could be in cultivating these forms at the expense of a state-consciousness.”²⁹⁵ Dewey supposed that as science and democracy came to full flower, religions based on supernatural beliefs and private doctrines would fade into history. He saw that a “fuller and deeper” kind of religion was emerging from the implications of science and democratic ways of living. With the demise of the church, schools and other social institutions would take over the

²⁹⁴ Ibid.
²⁹⁵ Ibid., 175.
broader religious work of social unification bringing about a “natural piety” that would reveal the spiritual value of science and democracy.\textsuperscript{296}

The tension between the value Dewey places on the school’s inclusion of a diversity of individuals with various cultural and religious backgrounds and his exclusion of religion from the schools is not easily assuaged. Contrary to Dewey’s ‘predictions’ concerning the end of religion and the triumph of science, religions continue to play a significant role in human society. How can the school honor the unique role of religion in the lives of students and yet reject religion? Dewey’s notion of “natural piety” perhaps best encapsulates his understandings of the function of the religious with the socially unifying purposes of the school. Dewey perceived that having a “natural piety” was a bridge between supernaturalism and militant atheism. Each, Dewey claimed, denied the “common career and destiny”\textsuperscript{297} of humanity and nature. Each served to obscure the dignity of human nature and its intimate connection to the natural world.

[Natural piety] may rest upon a just sense of nature as the whole of which we are parts, while it also recognizes that we are parts that are marked by intelligence and purpose, having the capacity to strive by their aid to bring conditions into greater consonance with what is humanly desirable. Such piety is an inherent constituent of a just perspective in life.\textsuperscript{298}

\textsuperscript{296} Ibid., 176-177.
\textsuperscript{297} Ibid., 176.
\textsuperscript{298} Dewey, A Common Faith, 32.
A way to honor the religious diversity of students in schools is to focus on the development of “natural piety.” Instead of surveying what may serve to be divisive theologically informed doctrinal beliefs, the schools, in maintaining their Deweyan aim of social unification, should seek to show how religions speak to the integration of humanity and nature.

Dewey brings together these two functions. He sees that the school should serve as the social incubator for the democratic society. As it functions toward that purpose, creating citizens, providing opportunities for social development toward developing skills for students to participate in a democratic society, the school itself must be formed as a democratic community. And as it strives toward that end, as it moves toward a socially unifying ideal, it performs a religious work. It functions as a religious experience. The sense of social and personal unity that is experienced in such a community is, for Dewey, a religious experience.

I have come to doubt that religion as part of the curriculum in public schools can counteract the effects of Neoliberalism. Religious education has its own purposes and its purpose within the public school indeed may function as part of a multicultural concern to educate for global citizenship. The inclusion of the study of religions may be part of what is required of a liberal education. And for some who lament the loss of Protestant ‘control’ of the schools it may serve as a way to reassert what they perceive as the ‘superior truth’ of American Protestant Christianity. Dewey would resist these assertions. However, the inclusion of the study about religions within the public school overlooks the root upon which Neoliberalism is hacking. Neoliberal practices
have so shaped the current educational landscape toward the breakdown of social and
democratic educational aims that a more focused and assertive approach toward
Dewey’s “associated way of living” is required. Certainly having more knowledge of
others and their religion would contribute to Dewey’s way of living in community.
But in Dewey’s notion of the religious work of schools, the erosion of the democratic
social community is its greatest threat. For Dewey, schools become more religious as
they become more democratic. Unless schools work to protect and promote
democratic ways against Neoliberalism, the inclusion of religion as a subject of study
may become just another tool in the global economic preparation game, subject to
standardization, quantification, and measurement for achievement status, if it survives
the cut at all. If schools, shaped by neoliberal practices, are limited in their abilities to
prepare democratic citizens, then arguments for or against the inclusion of the study of
religion in public education are simply moot. Even so, Dewey’s worry that the
inclusion of religion in the schools will work against its socially unifying function is
not easily overcome.

I have argued that the inclusion of the study of religion within the curriculum
of the public school would meet the demands of liberal education and help prepare
students to be better global citizens. Considering the deep seeded tendencies of
religion to factionalize and privatize when confronted with serious inquiry or scientific
contradiction I question the practical feasibility of such an inclusion. I wonder, along

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299 Dunn, “For Community Sake.”
with Dewey, if the subjectivitication of religion by historical and scientific criticism will lead to its demise. Dewey seemed to think that in light of the continued growth of the scientific mindset, religions would fade into the background of history like the gods of ancient Greece and Egypt. Perhaps the persistence of religions, particularly fundamentalist religions, is due to the fact that we do not subjectivize them in public schools, perhaps to their advantage. The scientific mindset has not fully permeated the society as Dewey had anticipated. The difficulty seems to be in working out Dewey’s vision for the religious work of schools in light of the persistence of denominational religion and the continuing privatization and factionalization of society. Yet this is only true if one makes the very un-Deweyan move of suggesting that the school can only do its religious work when religion has been eclipsed by the scientific. Dewey’s ‘wait and see’ approach to the question of including religious instruction in the schools is not necessarily a ‘wait and do nothing’ approach. As Dewey anticipated a better articulation of “religious feeling and thought which are consistent with modern democracy and modern science” he recognized that the school was already doing religious work in its function to unify society. Though Dewey was necessarily unsure and therefore reluctant to forecast what new religious mechanisms might form in the emerging intellectual climate, he was confident that it would need to be in continuity with science and that schools would need to conform its teaching methods to reflect these changes. Dewey was clear that religion gets in the way of the religious and that any attempts to reconcile various religions or even groups within a religion would be

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unfruitful. Religious knowledge of the other is not the basis for social unification. The best way to get to the religious is to live in community, to experience the processes of life together. Through the process of living together, solving social problems, participating in the successes and failures of shared life, we experience a unification with humanity and nature that is a profoundly religious experience.

I would like to recover some of the elements of my argument for use in this study. I outlined Leonard Swidler’s dialogical approach to religious reflection and maintain that it is still a valid and appropriate way to go about learning with others. I will show, however, that his approach makes more sense in public schools when it is focused on Dewey’s social democratic aims instead of the purpose of uniting people of different faiths around common doctrinal understandings. What I now recognize in Swidler’s approach to dialogue is its connections with Deweyan thought. Further I used Christian theologian Hans Küng’s approach to the study of religion as a way to meet the demands of a liberal education. Yet, as will be explored, his approach too, has basis in Dewey’s vision. Along with Küng, I seemed to think that by gaining some sort of unity in understanding among the religions, social unity might be achieved. Dewey makes a critically important reversal of this approach. In the process of working out democracy as “associated living” we move toward a social unity that is profoundly religious in function.

I have argued that the inclusion of the study of religion could serve to counteract some of the dehumanizing effects of Neoliberalism’s separating and competitive practices on public schools. I considered Christian theologian Hans

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Küng’s words concerning the religious situation of our time as an inspiring argument for including the study of religion within the purview of public education.\footnote{Küng, \textit{Judaism}, iii. No peace among nations without peace among the religions. No peace among the religions without dialogue between the religions. No dialogue between the religions without investigation of the foundations of the religions.} This of course is not revolutionary and, as public school curriculum changes have moved toward the inclusion of world religions, is not controversial. Since it is the case that so many of our public schools show increasing levels of religious and ethnic diversity reflecting the rich variety of a global community and as national, political, and economic forces require a certain kind of world cultural literacy, Küng’s vision is worth moving toward. Formidable complications remain however as to who, what, and how to teach these topics and remain within constitutional boundaries.\footnote{Haynes, “Getting Religion Right in Public Schools.”} Moreover, as Dewey has warned, how do we avoid the religious sectarianism that would pull apart the otherwise socially unifying work of school communities? Indeed, even though Küng’s vision may inspire such a role for the study of religion, he does not discuss its place within public education. His only specific mention of the location of this type of education is as a task for university religious studies departments and theological faculty.\footnote{Küng, \textit{Judaism}, 630.} His admitted trajectory is a “global ecumenical responsibility” brought about through the global consciousness of a shared fate. Küng is not ultimately concerned with uniformity of religion but information and dialogue that he hopes will lead to religious peace and eventually national peace.\footnote{Ibid., xvii.} His hope is that
world religions can come to some unified position on their priorities in order that they may contribute to solving some of the world’s most divisive problems (war, poverty, lack of freedom). Küng’s broader theological arguments and his confessed commitment to “essential Christian values” leads him to focus on the efforts to join together to “live differently, more authentically, more humanely”. He calls for a “truly radical humanism” that would engage Christians in the struggle against the dehumanizing aspects of world politics. Though Küng situates himself squarely and unashamedly within the Christian theological tradition, though critical of much of its institutional forms, he maintains the need for an “ecumenical” or common global ethic for humanity. All our efforts at dialogue and understanding will lead to a better world. Although Küng forefronts the knowledge of the religious other, the basis of his argument suggests that he values more the solving of human problems. This suggests that he may in fact agree with Dewey that religion gets in the way of human social unity. The doctrinal issues of religion divide us and what we really need is a global ethic based on our common human condition.

John Dewey’s distinction between religion and the religious may be helpful in meeting the requirements of liberal democratic society within the public school setting. The religious experience is “concerned with estimate of possibilities, with emotional stir by possibilities yet unrealized, and with all action in behalf of their

\[\text{305} \text{ Ibid., 630–31.}\]
\[\text{306} \text{ Kung, Why I Am Still a Christian, 60.}\]
\[\text{307} \text{ Ibid., 64–65 (emphasis original).}\]
realization.” Although Dewey articulates a religious functionality independent of a commitment to theistic foundations, he does provide us with a ‘common faith’ from which we can recognize the religious nature of all human experience. Although the study of religion in the public school can be a way to help students think and interact more expansively about personal religious experience and the religious other, curricular efforts would do better by setting religious practice in the broader context of religious liberties within a discussion of the requirements of a liberal democratic society. This type of discussion would require the development of complex skills including a robust dialogical approach. Here is where the Deweyan connections with Swidler’s understanding of dialogue are apparent and applicable in order to ‘thicken’ democratic ways of living.

Leonard Swidler’s work After the Absolute: The Dialogical Future of Religious Reflection, calls for a common cultural ‘language’ he calls an Ecumenical Esperanto. With full caution, he notes the unsuccessful attempt to establish Esperanto as a common world language that would facilitate international communication on a broad level. Esperanto was created by polish linguist Ludwick Zamenhof toward the end of the 19th century. He established basic grammatical rules for a ‘neutral language’ in an effort to address the growing need for international communication. Dewey refers to Esperanto, condemning it as a repellent and distasteful move toward

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308 Dewey, A Common Faith, 57.
309 “Lernu!”
uniformity and unanimity. Swidler is clear, however, to use Esperanto as an analogous term, with its noted limitations, to call for a dialogical approach that recognizes the commonality of human experiences. His approach to dialogue posits three main purposes: (1) Self-knowledge. Those with whom we dialogue will provide us with “mirrors” for self-understanding. (2) Authentic understanding of others. A profound knowledge of ourselves through dialogue with others will deepen our understanding of the things we hold in common as well as our differences. Swidler notes that in dialogue we discover what is complementary, analogous, and contradictory in ourselves and in the other. (3) A consonant way of life. Here Swidler reiterates his overall definition of dialogue as a process of learning, changing, and growing. The result of dialogue is to lead us to “live according to the fuller grasp of truth obtained in the dialogue”. The dialogical process will be transformative in that it causes as shift in our way of life in relation to our self and our fellow humans.

There are many overlapping concerns between Dewey and Swidler. Here I focus on two which are germane to the ways of democratic living. The first is the concern for communication in the process of living together in community. Dewey defined democracy as a form of community life. “It is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience.” In *Democracy and Education*, Dewey argued that when democracy is conceived in this sense it provides the

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311 Swidler, *After the Absolute*, 58.
312 Ibid., 61–66.
opportunity for the conditions of the good society. The desirable society should have
“not only more numerous and more varied points of shared common interest, but
greater reliance upon the recognition of mutual interests” and “not only freer
interaction between social groups (once isolated so far as intention could keep up a
separation) but change in social habit—its continuous readjustment through meeting
the new situations produced by varied intercourse.”  

He later clarifies:

The two points selected by which to measure the worth of a form of
social life are the extent in which the interests of a group are shared by
all its members, and the fullness and freedom with which it interacts
with other groups. An undesirable society, in other words, is one which
internally and externally sets up barriers to free intercourse and
communication of experience. A society which makes provision for
participation in its good of all its members on equal terms and which
secures flexible readjustment of its institutions through interaction of
the different forms of associated life is in so far democratic.

The notion of “flexible readjustment” as a result of “free intercourse and
communication of experience” fits quite well into Swidler’s definition of dialogue as
the means for change and growth. In fact, the very conditions of the relational aspects
of democratic living promote the conditions that require such dialogical interaction.

Dewey envisioned an all-inclusive form of democratic living that would
penetrate into every aspect of life. “The clear consciousness of a communal life, in all
its implications, constitutes the idea of democracy.”

\[314\] Ibid., 100.
\[315\] Ibid., 115.
\[316\] Robertson, “Is Dewey’s Educational Vision Still Viable?,” 341. (quoting Dewey from The Public and
its Problems)
which Dewey envisioned had a robust sense of what he called “communicated experience”. Dewey writes,

> Men live in a community in virtue of the things which they have in common; and *communication* is the way in which they come to possess things in common. What they must have in common in order to form a community or society are aims, beliefs, aspirations, knowledge-- a common understanding… The communication which ensures participation in a common understanding is one which secures similar emotional and intellectual dispositions--like ways of responding to expectations and requirements.³¹⁷

This vital sense of democratic living requires that citizens recognize and live consciously in community with others, knowing the demands of a network of needs and concerns and responding in ways that honor those needs. Democracy in this vital sense is not a static goal which stands outside the community, but a way of living that responds and evolves within the dynamic of human relationships. In a conception where the social conditions and roles are fixed and partitioned, where individuals are separate entities, democracy is not vital. Swidler claims this vital sense for communication and dialogue in the formation of common understandings in community. Through participation in dialogue humanity comes closer to discovering what is common for vital living.³¹⁸

The second overlapping concern for Dewey and Swidler is the exclusion of transcendent categories in the search for the common life. Swidler admits that vital

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dialogical relationships will help us work toward a ground of understanding that shapes a “universal theology of religion-ideology”. He defines theology as the “systematic reasoned reflection on the religious and ideological convictions held by human communities” and religion-ideology as “all the insights of a faith or an ideology that attempts to explain the ‘ultimate meaning of life and how to live accordingly.’”

This ground of understanding must be built on categories and images based in our humanity. A common language will require an “attempt to cast our religious and ideological insights in language ‘from below’, from our humanity, rather than ‘from above,’ from the perspective of the transcendent or the divine…we must try to speak a language of immanence, not of transcendence.”

He does not suggest that religious persons necessarily reject their belief in the transcendent, but that the work of constructing a common language and life in relation will require a conscious and articulate language based in human experience. Swidler nuances the notion of transcendence to suggest that the transcendent is imbedded within our everyday human experiences. “In everyday life and in modern science human beings are constantly engaged in acts of self-transcendence, of going beyond their present status, whether by learning more, acting more efficiently, or behaving more ethically.”

Swidler equates “ultimate meaning of life” with “what it means to be fully human”. Struggling together for the content of what it means to be fully human then becomes

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319 Ibid., 54.
320 Ibid., 56.
321 Ibid.
the criteria for testing the functionality of a religion or ideology to facilitate full human life.322 This is Dewey’s ‘essence of religion’ or religious functionality that leads to common understandings within a democratic society. Dewey called “the sense of the permanent and inevitable implication of nature and man in a common career and destiny” a “natural piety.”323 Though Swidler’s focus is confined to inter-religious and inter-ideological dialogue, his insight envisions ‘associated living’ reminiscent of Dewey’s vision of a democratic society.

Given the above considerations of Dewey’s understandings of religion, democracy and the function of schools, my focus will turn now to the role of the teacher within this matrix of ideas. At the end of his Pedagogic Creed, Dewey writes that “the teacher always is the prophet of the true God and the usherer in of the true kingdom of God.”324 In contrast to neoliberal ways of thinking and being, I want to suggest how Dewey’s notion of the religious and his enigmatic claim that the teacher is a “prophet of the true God” might help us think differently about the work of teachers within our current neoliberal regime. With this renewed vision, I will position teachers as the prophets of democracy who work to subvert the consciousness of neoliberal schooling.

322 Ibid., 63–64.
324 John Dewey, My Pedagogic Creed.
Chapter 4: The Teacher as Prophet

In this chapter I want to review, in broad terms, the deleterious effects of neoliberal conceptions of teaching on more generous democratic forms as Dewey conceived them. The values of neoliberalism seep into the practice of teaching and work to reposition teachers within its scheme. It cuts deep grooves in the everyday work of teaching and learning, shaping every aspect of schooling. Neoliberalism teaches teachers how to be. In contrast to neoliberal ways of thinking and being, I want to suggest how Dewey’s notion of the religious and his enigmatic claim that the teacher is a “prophet of the true God” might help us think differently about the work of teachers within our current neoliberal regime. With this renewed vision, I will position teachers as the prophets of democracy who work to subvert the consciousness of neoliberal schooling.

Under the hegemony of the neoliberal imagination, teachers and the professional work of teaching have been reduced to the technical and the labor of learning to the art of bubble-filling. The crushing dehumanization within this kind of technicalization distances teachers from their labor—and their students—where the ‘products’ of education are narrowly conceived for their value positioned within the economic marketplace. Pervasive standardization in the form of national “Common Core,” alignment of curriculum to an increasingly punitive array of high stakes testing,
and scripted lessons with predetermined learning objectives have become the
imperatives for educational ‘efficiency’ and ‘success’ while working to erode
creativity, critical thinking, civic responsibility, and democracy itself.

The reconfiguration of classical economic liberalism in the early 1980s, often
referred to as neo-liberalism, has found fertile soil within the context of a globalized
marketplace. Though philosophically and ideologically related to its predecessor,
neoliberalism continues to play out in the extreme with pervasive and deleterious
effects on the potential for democratic ways of being and living in our world. Within
the neoliberal, the government gives up its role as a force for collective public good
and aligns itself with the imperatives of the corporate sector. This alliance has led to,
in Klein’s words, “the elimination of the public sphere, total liberation for
corporations and skeletal social spending,… a powerful ruling alliance between a few
very large corporations and a class of mostly wealthy politicians – with hazy and ever
shifting lines between the two groups.”325 The drastic move away from Keynesian
economic policies not only drains public sector funding for health care, education and
other social programs, but works to dismantle the social consciousness. The sense of
the cooperative social good is overshadowed by the competitive individual in the
marketplace. Indeed, neoliberalism has become the enemy of democracy.

The contemporary public silence surrounding the aims and purposes of
education within a culture shaped by the imperatives of a globalized competitive

325 Klein, The Shock Doctrine, 15
economy suggests the hegemonic success of neoliberalism. Where there is no alternative, there is no need for debate. Denigration of public education is widespread with privateers offering more of the same with only the promise to do a ‘better job.’ The punitive effects of federally mandated education policy that weighs disproportionately on the poor, the assault on teacher professionalism that narrows teacher value and effectiveness to a test score, and the growing parental opposition to state assessments are clear signs of the need for an alternative vision. Teachers and the public in general need a new vision of education and the work of teachers that will lift our eyes from our transfixed worship of quantifiable performance outcomes—the pinnacle of neoliberal legitimacy—and bring us to our democratic senses.

The neoliberal veneration of the marketplace has wedded national economic security within a competitive globalized marketplace to the ‘success’ of public education. Increasing corporate interest and sponsorship of the ‘business’ of education has placed neoliberal economic policies at the center of our educational vision. Education modeled on the imperatives of business has led to the proliferation of standardized testing and the multi-billion-dollar testing industry amid an increasingly quantified and punitively enforced accountability structure. Whilst raising educational ‘standards’ on one hand and defunding public education on the other, neoliberal policy makers point particularly to urban schools’ chronic failure to meet standards as typical of another inefficient public system in need of the redemptive effects of the free
market. The neoliberal dream of free market education and the end of the public school is looming. Public education is well within the grip of radical market imperatives and like never before schools are drafted into the global economic supremacy game where education is aligned with the imperial designs of big business.

Students within the business of schooling are conceived as knowledge consumers and collectors of prepackaged information which they recycle in an ever morphing array of testing mechanisms. In neoliberal schooling, students are the objects, shaped and molded for economic fitness, tools for the gears of business. The edifice of knowledge is impervious to question or dialogue and accountability structures keep the boundaries of critical thinking well contained. Although this struggle has its roots in the very history of public schooling itself, the contemporary iteration is extreme in its political force and federal legitimacy maintained by the global economic paranoia of big business.

Teachers within this regime have little say concerning what they teach, when they teach it and increasingly how they teach. The nation-wide imposition of standards and high stakes testing regimes narrow and degrade curricular interest and focus as teachers are pressured to teach to the test in an effort to raise scores. The accountability structures of testing work to maintain teachers’ focus on data collection and analyzation of student test performance even while their own performance is

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326 A recent proposal to convert half of Los Angeles County public schools to charter schools is an extreme but growing trend of neoliberal schooling. See also Klein 2007, Saltman 2007: Schooling in Disaster Capitalism.

327 Dewey, Experience And Education.
under constant surveillance. This over-quantification of teaching and learning deforms the humanity of the student-teacher relationship into an equation of performance mechanics. Boxley theorizes that the “imposition of standards of measurable attainment within all spheres of educational work mean that the relationship between teachers and the results of their labour is becoming, exactly, a relation to quantities.”328 Teachers are “very often forced to act and make judgements as if their own and the learners’ humanity had been forgotten.”329 What Boxley calls the “fetishised commodity of performance”330 has repositioned teachers as technicians disengaged from the processes of teaching and learning. Teachers, with their gaze fixated toward the quantifiable, are conscripted into the business of producing test takers, standardized knowers, information collectors, and ‘career-ready’ workers. As a teacher, I am conditioned to worry about performance outcomes. As my own ‘success’—the viability of my work as a teacher—is tied to one ominous day of testing, I have found myself using the testing performance as motivational leverage. I pass on, not only the anxiety of the accountability structures themselves, but the threads that bind together testing performance and economic viability. Low performing students are easily conceived as potential drags on the economy. Within the context of testing I have even questioned students as to their job prospects without a high school education, reinforcing the erroneous and suspicious collusion of test performance, career readiness, and what it means to be educated. I too often envision

329 Ibid.
330 Ibid., 83.
my students as potential workers, not as community leaders, not as participating parents in the lives of their children, not as whole persons but simply in terms of what work they will do. What economic contributions will they make or will they be ‘dependent’ on society? These are surely important questions. These are practical aspects of an education and have been part of the educational conversation from the start. These concerns should not be left out. Yet the exclusivity of these concerns forecloses the articulation of broader social and civic concerns for the purposes of schooling. The quantifiable outcomes of the testing regime loom so large as the measure of success that there is little available fodder for alternative conceptions. Instead of nurturing creators, thinkers, and socially conscious democratic citizens, teachers are conscripted into the construction of individualized econo-zombies whose primary function is consuming in a global marketplace. Teachers are positioned as taskmasters in a game of forward progress toward the elusive goals of corporate success.

The dilemma of teaching within this scheme can be well allegorized in Tennyson’s depiction of the Crimean war’s *Charge of the Light Brigade*:

Forward, [forward, forward] the Light Brigade!  
Was there a man dismay’d?  
Not tho’ the soldier knew  
   Someone had blunder’d:  
T heirs not to make reply,  
T heirs not to reason why,  
T heirs but to do and die…

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Dewey makes allusion to the Tennyson poem in his critique of ‘traditional’ education as it “forbids much active participation by pupils in the development of what is taught. Theirs is to do—and learn, as it was the part of the six hundred to do and die.”

The forward march into the maw of death reveals a futility of learning without question or reason; just to play a part in someone else’s blunder. With learning so aligned with death, the learners, like the soldiers, take on a nobility in their unquestioning, unreasoning, forward facing obedience. Moreover, their immediate commanders, their ‘teachers’ go with them into the valley, into the mouth of Hell with apparent knowledge of the blunder. Yet this knowledge is best obscured. Forward progress must be made.

The brutality of this skirmish is, of course, a symptom of a broader injustice. Dewey claims that the injustice is rooted in a theoretical miscalculation, a fallacy, a philosophical blunder. There is a philosophical blunder. It is a blunder that leads to a brutality; one which good teachers try to conceal amid the march of forward progress. Like Tennyson’s commanders, teachers recognize the blunder and its inhumaneness. They recognize what Dewey might call the ‘collateral learning damage’ done to the souls of students who are conditioned to an unquestioning decent into the valley of death. Teachers are just following ‘orders’, but, unlike their students, the teachers are implicated. Though they ride alongside just as vulnerable to death, their nobility is siphoned away in the injustice and when the official poems are

331 Dewey, Experience And Education, 19.
332 Ibid.
333 Ibid., 48–49.
written they take on imperial blame and public scorn. Teachers are caught in the crossfire. Teachers are jammed in between the machinations of imperial aspirations and the clouded dreams of human flourishing. Teachers are made accountable for industrial designs even as they hear the cries of their own who do and die.

Before building a more general picture of the function of the prophetic, I want to do some exegetical work on Dewey’s enigmatic claim that teachers are prophets. What could he have meant when he claimed the role of the teacher as the “prophet of the true God and the usherer in of the true kingdom of God”? As discussed in the last chapter, Dewey’s understanding of God and the kingdom of God are intimately intertwined with his human relational understanding of a democratic society. And for Dewey, the best hope for humanity to learn how to live and work toward “associated living” are the in schools where the teachers live up to their high calling as prophets. Published in 1897 in the midst of his tenure as head of the Department of Philosophy and director of the School of Education at the University of Chicago, Dewey’s creed established the strong social function of the school and the role of the teacher as one of an artist and servant of this social function. The culmination of Dewey’s creed, however, is striking in its use of religious language. Though the title evokes the religious, such language or allusion is found nowhere else in the creed itself. As his final statement Dewey equates the servant role of the teacher with that of a “prophet of the true God” and the social order with “the true kingdom of God”. Though the creed

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presents no complete picture of Dewey’s understanding of God or the role of religion in society, it hints of what is formulated in previous and contemporaneous writings and forecasts later conceptualizations. Proper exegetical analysis will need to be sensitive to the chronological position of the creed in relation to Dewey’s broader work. Works twenty to thirty years after the creed may show thematic affinity but due to the evolution of Dewey’s thought may be conceptually tenuous. For exegetical purposes it is better to look for conceptual ties in the contemporaneous context of the claim (teachers are prophets) unless there is specific reference to or development of the claim in later works. For example, Dewey’s later publication *Ethics* in 1908 where he writes specifically on the role of Hebrew prophets in the development of morals may shed light on Dewey’s understanding of the prophetic role in previous thought. Rosenow sees a consistency of thought for Dewey, so, as is evident below, he can use *A Common Faith*, published almost forty years after the creed as his primary source for interpretation. I am not suggesting that *A Common Faith* be excluded from our view as we attempt to understand Dewey’s ideas. However, due to the nature of this particular claim i.e. its position isolated at the end of a comparatively underdeveloped though perhaps ‘summary’ thesis and the ambiguity of the claim itself, a narrower contextual field that includes contemporaneous writings may be more faithful to the claim.

To take a closer look, I will use the work of Rosenow and Webster in dialogue with my own understanding of Dewey’s claim in order to show its significance for our understanding of teachers within the regime of neoliberal schooling. My purpose here
is not to draw broad conclusions concerning Dewey’s religious views, which has been addressed in the previous chapter, nor to foreclose the continuing inquiry and debate between philosophy and theology, but to explore the possibilities that Dewey’s claim for the prophetic role of teachers is significant for the struggle against neoliberal schooling.

Rosenow concludes that Dewey’s conceptualization of the religious and religion is invalid and inadequate for the ongoing debate between secular and religious understandings of theology and philosophy. He claims that Dewey simply collapses the religious into the secular and further polarizes secular and religious camps. Rosenow’s view allows him to then disqualify Dewey’s claim outright.

It is consequently not the teacher's task to be 'the prophet of the true God', nor to function as the usherer in of the true kingdom of God'. The task of the educator is to assist his or her pupils in discovering modes of self-realisation which would be beneficial for both themselves and their fellow-creatures—irrespective of whether these modes are religious or not.335 Earlier he writes:

Dewey’s teacher is no delegate of this or that religious church; the truth he transmits to his pupils is not a religious doctrine, and the God whose kingdom he ministers to is no theistic God. The same applies to the religious experience Dewey associates with his God: *this experience has nothing in common with the sphere of holiness in which the devout approaches the God of traditional religion.*336

335 Rosenow, “The Teacher as Prophet of the True God,” 437.
336 Ibid., 434. Emphasis added.
We can see from other contemporaneous writings that Rosenow is correct in recognizing that in Dewey the traditional theistic God and the doctrines of the church are ‘reconstructed’. Rosenow’s apparent discomfort with Dewey’s reconstruction leads him to misrepresent Dewey’s understanding of the function of religious experience and therefore the role of the prophetic teacher. I sense that Rosenow says it but doesn’t say it. His conclusion hints at a way out of his dilemma but because he sees Dewey’s work as polarizing, he is unable to take that road. Again, in contrast, I will show that the teacher can be ‘the prophet of the true God’, and function as the ‘usherer in of the true kingdom of God’.

First of all, Rosenow seems to misrepresent Dewey’s understanding of religious experience in the context of Dewey’s work to collapse the dualism between the religious and the secular. “Dewey describes a situation in which the religious cannot be identified as one compartmentalized dimension of existence.” Indeed Dewey argues that the experiences that are traditionally marked off within the specialized realm of religion are common experiences requiring no division into separate realms. As Webster writes, “Dewey’s pragmatism requires world-views, ideals and religious beliefs to demonstrate and justify their value and have these tested in our current existence.” Dewey does not distinguish between holy and profane because his task is to abolish the dualistic nature of reality, to recognize a oneness, a

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337 Boisvert, John Dewey, 412.
339 Rosenow, “The Teacher as Prophet of the True God,” 434.
unity which notions of secular and profane seek to undermine. Dewey cannot be said to “camouflage” or replace the religious with the secular, socially or politically\textsuperscript{340} because Dewey recognizes that in practice there is no such division. For Dewey, a religion that has no social or political implications is meaningless and an attempt to derive social practice from sources outside the realm of the natural world is an intellectual assertion that exacerbates the dualism. In \textit{Psychology} (1887), Dewey contends for an understanding of religious experience as the bridging of the “gulf between the actual and the ideal” that recognizes the commonality in all experience.

Since the entire intellectual, aesthetic, and moral life is one of idealization, it is evident that the feeling of faith, which religion insists upon and induces, is the feeling which is \textit{implicitly involved in all experience whatever}. Religious feeling, or faith, is absolutely universal, universal in its object, and universal as coextensive with all experience.\textsuperscript{341}

Dewey reiterated this notion in \textit{A Common Faith} explaining that experiences that are usually “marked off” into the religious realm function no differently than other common experiences that bring about a “better adjustment in life and its conditions” and indeed “occur frequently in connection with many significant moments in life.”\textsuperscript{342} Rosenow’s claim that the “central issue of … \textit{A Common Faith}, is actually not a religious one, but a social and political problem”\textsuperscript{343} reveals a misunderstanding of

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\textsuperscript{340} ibid., 435–36.  \\
\textsuperscript{342} Dewey, \textit{A Common Faith}, 9–11.  \\
\textsuperscript{343} Rosenow, “The Teacher as Prophet of the True God,” 436.
\end{flushright}
Dewey’s attempt to close the gap between the religious and the secular by viewing social and political problems as distinct from the religious. Not recognizing Dewey’s broader vision leads Rosenow to assert that Dewey is simply “anti-religious” when just the opposite may be the case. Dewey is hard-pressed to promote the fuller understanding of the pervasive function of the religious in all of human experience. It is the case, as Webster suggests, that Dewey’s views, rather than being anti-religious, are “simply different.”

Rosenow’s criticism of Dewey for not including “categories of religious salvation and of the holy” reveals what seems to be an unwillingness to take Dewey’s fuller project into consideration. Rosenow wants to keep these categories of traditional doctrinal conceptualizations that are somehow separated and elevated above and beyond the ground of the natural world. This “other-worldliness” is for Dewey, the problem of religion’s focus on doctrine and the inner life of the believer to the exclusion of engaged social action. “All the theories which put conversion ‘of the eye of the soul’ in the place of a conversion of natural and social objects that modifies goods actually experienced, are a retreat and escape from existence… The typical example is perhaps the other-worldliness found in religions whose chief concern is with the salvation of the personal soul.”

Dewey’s 1886 address to the Student’s Christian Association reveals his early concern that theoretical religious categories and

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344 Ibid., 430.
345 Webster, “Dewey’s Democracy as the Kingdom of God on Earth,” 616.
346 Rosenow, “The Teacher as Prophet of the True God,” 436.
particularly teachings concerning personal piety promoted a disengagement from the social life of service which has us “turning round and round in the paddock of our own selfishness.” For Dewey, the engagement of faith in action should inform our religious experiences instead of preconceived doctrines of religious “truth”. Webster notes here that “[d]octrine in the form of dogma can attempt to present the truth of a matter even before the experience occurs, therefore causing persons to become abstracted out of existence in order to comply with another realm of abstracted certainties in the form of traditional doctrine.” Rosenow is asking Dewey to escape the natural and social in an effort to ‘clarify’ an a priori theological position in order to properly ground the role of teachers within the prophetic. If then, for Rosenow, Dewey’s prophet teacher has no grounding in the “categories of religious salvation” or the traditional doctrines of religion, he or she cannot be a prophet.

Then there is Rosenow’s seeming refusal to give Dewey’s notion of God serious reflection. To Dewey, says Rosenow, “‘God’ is only a name…nothing more or less than the unity of ideal human ends and endeavors.” And later Rosenow states that Dewey’s “concept of God is devoid of any…systematic foundation: it is only a term, a mere word.” This obscures the complexity of Dewey’s understandings of the function of religious ideas. It may be the case that Dewey is willing to give up the intellectual assertion of a super-natural pre-existent being, the traditional religious

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349 Webster, “Dewey’s Democracy as the Kingdom of God on Earth,” 624.
350 Rosenow, “The Teacher as Prophet of the True God,” 434.
351 Ibid., 436.
doctrine of God, but he is unwilling to disregard its religious function, how such a religious ideal operates within the realm of natural human experience. Webster, too, admits that Dewey’s “idea of God, while often vague and at times challenging for traditional accounts, reflected his pragmatic consistency in centering experiences as the legitimate basis for the formulation of our significant meanings.” As discussed in the previous chapter, Dewey gives voice to the challenge that scientific discovery has given to the traditional ideas of religion. He writes in a 1933 review of *Is There a God?* that the intellectual confrontation requires either the “surrender of the older conception of God or else a broadening out of it to meet the change in conception of the universe and history to which the God believed in is related.” To develop a “systematic foundation” as Rosenow suggests, besides being a task for which Dewey would have found unnecessary, misses Dewey’s concern for the functional power of the religious idea of God. In what is perhaps most definitive of Dewey’s understanding of the function of the idea of God he writes in reply to the authors of *Is There a God?*

Separating the matter of religious experience from the question of the existence of God (as for example those as far apart from one another as the Buddhists and the Comtean Positivists have done), I have found—and there are many who will corroborate my experience by their own—that all of the things which traditional religionists prize and which they connect exclusively with their own conception of God can be had equally well in the ordinary course of human experience in our relations to the natural world and to one another as human beings related in the family, friendship, industry, art, science, and citizenship. *Either then the concept of God can be dropped out as far*

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352 Webster, “Dewey’s Democracy as the Kingdom of God on Earth,” 630.
as genuinely religious experience is concerned, or it must be framed wholly in terms of natural and human relationship involved in our straightaway human experience.\textsuperscript{354}

The tenor of Dewey’s work suggests that he understands the difficulty and tension which the challenge of science has brought to traditional conceptions of God and that moving toward a functional understanding of faith may indeed provide the comfort and consolation we need to promote the “furtherance of good in human life.”\textsuperscript{355}

Framing God “wholly in terms of natural and human relationship” is to recognize the immanent function of God as an ideal that has power within our natural existence. While it may ‘empty out’ the isolated conceptual questions of existence, it ‘fills in’ the connected and practical questions of how ideals function in our everyday experience. The force of ideals is not “nothing but a term or word”\textsuperscript{356} as Rosenow claims. For Dewey, the “aims and ideals that move us are generated through imagination. But they are not made out of imaginary stuff. They are made out of the hard stuff of the world of physical and social experience.”\textsuperscript{357} The “systematic foundation” for which Rosenow expects from Dewey appears to be some sort of theological speculation, an aim or ideal without the “hard stuff” of the natural world.

Clearly Rosenow has more qualms with Dewey’s ‘fuzzy’ theology than with the role and task of Dewey’s teacher. He admits that assisting pupils in “discovering modes of self-realisation which would be beneficial for both themselves and their

\textsuperscript{354} Ibid., 224. Emphasis original
\textsuperscript{355} Ibid., 221.
\textsuperscript{356} Rosenow, “The Teacher as Prophet of the True God,” 436.
\textsuperscript{357} Dewey, \textit{A Common Faith}, 33.
fellow-creatures” is the task of the Deweyan teacher. He agrees, however flippantly, that “[t]he ‘true’ God, whose prophet Dewey’s teacher is, is consequently nothing more or less than the unity of ideal human ends and endeavors, and the ‘true’ kingdom of God whose usherer-in this teacher is, is the social community which actualizes this ideal unity.”358 Here Rosenow essentially makes Dewey’s claim that speaks to the function of the teacher as prophet. He seems to agree with the task of the Deweyan teacher, “irrespective of whether these modes are religious or not.”359 Rosenow’s notion of what is “true” theologically leads him to disparage the prophetic role of the teacher by minimizing its significance to “nothing more or less”, rather than the great calling which Dewey imagined. It is unclear how Rosenow’s teacher would function differently if she or he had the “correct” theological perspective. Perhaps, however, this is Rosenow’s unstated point. The Deweyan teacher can function as prophet irrespective of their allegiance to the traditional doctrines of theism.

It is with this function that the teacher is intimately engaged. Dewey claims that the teacher “always is the prophet of the true God and the usherer in of the true kingdom of God.”360 As elaborated above, Dewey’s God is not the supernatural Being of traditional religion, but as he defines it, “the active relation between ideal and actual”361 The kingdom of this God, the reign of this God is the realm where this activity is taking place in the social environment. The teacher as a “social servant set

359 Ibid., 437.
apart for the maintenance of proper social order and the securing of the right social
growth”, is positioned as prophet within this realm of activity. Dewey’s conception
points to the function of communities to struggle together with their natural
environment to bring about their ideals.

Dewey recognized the power of the prophetic as the “most significant moral
agency”\textsuperscript{362} in the struggle for social ideals within a community. The ideal social order
is perhaps incompletely expressed in social and political structures throughout history,
but it is not an other-worldly endeavor that escapes into a heavenly realm while
forsaking society. In \textit{Ethics}, his work on the historical development of moral order
reveals the place of the prophets within the community to present the “ideal of a moral
order on earth … It was an ideal not dreamed out in ecstatic visions of pure fancy, but
worked out in struggle and suffering, in confidence that moral efforts are not hopeless
or destined to defeat. The ideal order is to be made real. The divine kingdom is to
come, the divine will to be done ”\textit{on earth as it is in heaven.”}\textsuperscript{363}

The popularized understanding of the prophet is one who is the forecaster or
predictor of future events. This version of the prophetic role is due in part to a literalist
reading of biblical texts tied to a tradition of exegesis within Fundamentalist
Christianity that reads New Testament writings as ‘fulfillment’ of ‘Old’ Testament
prophecies. Under the scrutiny of various methods of biblical criticism (i.e. historical,
literary, and textual criticism) the role of the biblical prophet takes on a much different

\textsuperscript{363} Ibid., 104–5.
function. Richard A. Horsley and John S. Hanson recognize that there were two different types of prophets in the first century that functioned within a tradition rooted in the biblical narratives of the Hebrew bible. “The principle function of the one, the oracular prophet, was to pronounce the impending judgment or redemption by God. The characteristic feature of the other, the action prophet, was to inspire and lead a popular movement to vigorous participation in an anticipated redemptive action by God.”

The oracular prophets of the traditions found within the classical prophetic books of the Hebrew bible function from within specific communities as messengers of God. They function sociologically within the community as advocates for the poor and oppressed. The prophet’s message is directed to the ruling class whose power and socio-economic policies continued to exploit and repress the peasant classes. The oracles of warning are rooted in the covenant policies of justice and concern for the widow, the orphan, and the oppressed. Oracles of hope and redemption are based on the ‘repentance’ or return of the community to the ways of God, upholding God’s concern for justice. The primary function of the prophet is social change, a movement from existing conditions of injustice to a place of ‘righteousness’, a condition of just relationships within the community. Dewey wrote similarly that the prophets offered a growing moral force that was fearlessly critical of social evil. The prophets “looked forward as well as at the here and now, and gave their people, and the world, a larger hope of a reign of justice, right, and peace.”

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364 Horsley and Hanson, *Bandits, Prophets, and Messiahs*, 135.
Prophets do not come prepackaged. They do not intend from the outset to be prophetic. They are, in true Deweyan manner, contextual. The message of the prophet is not imposed from the outside. The prophetic calls for a perspective that comes from within the community. Naming oppression is not intellectual work that is imposed from the outside but must rise from the actual people who are experiencing the situation of injustice. Miles Horton suggests that this leaves us “working with remnants”, with “little pockets of hope and adventurism.” Finding those pockets is a process of being involved, walking with and listening to, hearing cries, and feeling cries, having a consciousness of the social atmosphere. This indeed calls for an insider’s view, a view from membership within the community. It is not based on some fully formed grand design from which life must be patterned. As Dewey understood:

Effective plans of improvement are not born of empty aspiration, miscalled idealism, but out of experience of the concrete evils wrought by institutions as they are. We often overlook the fact that the moral prophet who stands out against the dominant conditions of his age is as much influenced by social conditions as is the conformist, more deeply so in fact. The positive and negative values of existing institutions are more truly reflected in his desire and imagination than in those of the conformist: otherwise his protest is sentimental and futile. While the negative values call out desire for something different and better, the positive values supply the content and material attributed to the better. There is no source save past experience out of which the concrete stuff of new aspirations can be formed.367

366 Horton and Freire, *We Make the Road by Walking*, 94.
The work of the prophet arises from the cries from within a particular historical setting. What forges the prophet is the situation of oppression, the intense sense of injustice, the pressing vice of unfairness. The work of the prophet is to expose the sham, to discount the official poem and offer liberating hope for an alternative, more humane way of being. Abraham Heshel’s definitive work *The Prophets* begins with this line: “This book is about some of the most disturbing people who have ever lived…”  

The prophet is unconcerned with philosophical ramblings and theoretical propositions disconnected from the everyday. The prophet has no voice for cosmic absolutes or theological proofs. Heshel’s portrait of the prophet throws us into oration about widows and orphans, about corruption of judges and affairs of the market place. Instead of showing us a way through the elegant mansions of the mind, the prophets take us to the slums. The world is a proud place, full of beauty, but the prophets are scandalized, and rave as if the whole world were a slum.  

The prophet is on edge and rubbed raw. The slightest breeze of injustice may provoke some insanity. What we have come to see as a normal part of our social landscape, the prophet sees as obscenity. “To us a single act of injustice—cheating in business, exploitation of the poor—is slight; to the prophets, a disaster. To us injustice is injurious to the welfare of the people; to the prophets it is a deathblow to existence; to

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368 Heschel, *The Prophets*, xxi.
369 Ibid., 3.
us, an episode; to them, a catastrophe, a threat to the world.”³⁷⁰ The prophet is hyper-sensitized to disequilibrium within the social world.

The tradition of the prophetic has and continues to have strong theological affiliation. The prophet is the partner with God in setting right the world. The shattering words of the prophet have no fear of priest or king whose God is a comfort and justification for power. To the prophet, the presence of God is neither comfort nor security. To the prophet, God’s presence is persistent challenge and dogged demand.³⁷¹ The purview of the prophet is social change, a movement from existing conditions of injustice to a place of ‘righteousness’, a state of just relationships within history. The prophet rises from within the community to name the exploitive practices of oppressors and gives voice to those who are crushed by those practices. In addition to harsh criticism, the prophet offers an alternative redemptive vision to the status quo. In claiming the task of the prophet, Walter Brueggemann offers the hypothesis that ‘the task of [the] prophetic…is to nurture, nourish, and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture.”³⁷² Brueggemann offers the biblical story of the Israelites in Egypt and the rise of Moses to become the prophet of God as the prototypical conditions for the prophetic. The odyssey of Moses begins as he is nursed and cared for by his own people, given over to Pharaoh’s daughter and raised in the palace of Egyptian power. His path toward the

³⁷⁰ Ibid., 4.
³⁷¹ Ibid., 19.
prophetic begins not with the burning bush in the wilderness\textsuperscript{373} but with his impulsive response to injustice. He sees the injustice of the empire pressed upon the backs of his natal people. His eyes are opened to the brutality of ‘curricular’ imposition. The goals of empire are imposed with punitive force. Egypt’s aim for supremacy calls for the conscripted labor of Hebrews. Brick-making quotas meet the need for forward progress in the service of imperial designs.

The prophet functions to dismantle the dominant consciousness of Egyptian oppression by rejecting its legitimacy, calling into question its oppressive socio-economic policies. At the same time the prophet offers an alternative vision and calls into consciousness a new social reality which enables, or “energizes”, the growth of an alternative community. Moses, as prophet, “dismantles the politics of oppression and exploitation by countering it with a \textit{politics of justice and compassion}.”\textsuperscript{374} The prophet is called from within the community to be critical of those policies and ways of living that crush and oppress while, at the same time, offering hope in the possibilities of an alternative way of being that is compassionate and just. Dewey recognized this as an act of the imagination which envisions the rearrangement of existing things that would evolve new objects. The same thing is true of a painter, a musician, a poet, a philanthropist, a moral prophet. The new vision does not arise out of nothing, but emerges through seeing, in terms of possibilities, that is, of imagination, old things in new relations serving a new end which the new end aids in creating.\textsuperscript{375}

\textsuperscript{373} Shalom-Guy, “The Call Narratives of Gideon and Moses: Literary Convention or More?”
\textsuperscript{374} Brueggemann, \textit{The Prophetic Imagination}, 14. (emphasis original).
\textsuperscript{375} Dewey, \textit{A Common Faith}, 34.
The prophet reimagines the static conditions of the dominant consciousness and offers energizing hope for change.

The work of the prophet is linked to pragmatism in Cornel West’s vision of Prophetic Pragmatism. West roots his understanding of the prophet in the tradition of prophetic Christianity primarily shaped within the black church tradition. His early formulations are articulated in *Prophesy Deliverance!* (1982) where he argues for prophetic Christianity’s norms of individuality and democracy. The norm of individuality is the “radical egalitarian” idea that “every individual regardless of class, country, caste, race, or sex should have the opportunity to fulfill his or her potentialities” which is then rooted in and shaped by the conditions of community. The conditions of community that allow for the flourishing of individuality require democratic participation in the processes that determine life together. “Democratic participation of people in the decision-making processes of institutions that regulate and govern their lives is a precondition for actualizing the Christian principle of the self-realization of human individuality in community. The norms of individuality and democracy are in this way inseparable.” West finds that the primary work of the prophet is to recognize and reveal substantially existing evil in the world and in so doing, call for a deliverance that leads to the greater generation of human possibility and freedom. Substantially existing evil could be inclusive of any social structure

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377 Ibid., 147–51.
378 Ibid., 26–27.
that limits individuality and democratic participation. The prophetic turns its gaze toward the oppressed and the social structures that oppress them.

Prophetic social action in the world with particular focus on the oppressed is linked to Pragmatism’s understanding of the communal and constructive nature of knowledge with a strong focus on the ethical. Pragmatism’s insistence upon “consequent phenomena” in an unfinished world recognizes the contingency of existing reality without a need for antecedent foundational structures.  

Existence is not a ‘must be’ nor is it preordained by the ‘natural’ order of things. The ‘way things are’ is a result of human action in the world and therefore open to continual revision and experimentation that would serve to bring about a ‘better’ way. Dewey summarized Pragmatism by claiming that “it is…not the origin of a concept, it is its application which becomes the criterion of its value.”  

The truth of a concept is found in its ethical consequences not in its preexistence or its scientific predictability. West contends that pragmatic truth is “a species of the good and the conception of the good has to do with defining it in relation to temporal consequences prospectively.”

Pragmatism claims that no version of reality is set in stone. Human social existence is not at the mercy of past traditions nor our present historical circumstances. Our social world is of our own making and is therefore contingent upon our consciousness and our ability to remake it. Life as we know it is the result of our

380 Ibid., 16.
381 West, *Prophetic Thought in Postmodern Times*, 40.
decisions and our future is still to be determined. “Faith in the power of intelligence to imagine a future which is the projection of the desirable in the present, and to invent the instrumentalities of its realization, is our salvation.”382 With a future open to the imagination and rife with ethical implications, the prophetic pragmatist works to dismantle the ‘stabilities’ of the current dominant ideologies and seeks a consciousness that aims toward human freedom.

The distinctive hallmarks of a prophetic pragmatist are a universal consciousness that promotes an all-embracing democratic and libertarian moral vision, a historical consciousness that acknowledges human finitude and conditionedness, and a critical consciousness which encourages relentless critique and self-criticism for the aims of social change and personal humility.383

Prophetic Pragmatism is tuned to the frequencies of human crises and challenge within our historical moment, the social crises and structural challenges that crush human freedom and dignity. Armed with a consciousness of contingency and a moral vision that dreams of democratic community, the prophet invites social engagement and intelligent action toward ‘righteousness’.

Although the biblical prophet partners with the deity in the pursuit of righteousness, it is clear that Dewey’s understanding of God is not the supernatural Being of traditional religion.384 Though Dewey’s writings are peppered with biblical and religious allusion, his conception of the religious points to the function of

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communities to struggle together with their natural environment to bring about their ideals. Although the prophetic identity is fashioned by the mythic stories that have served to shape a particular religion, in Dewey’s conception of the religious, it serves a powerful function. Instead of avoiding, what would be for Dewey, the troubling metaphysical assumptions within these stories, he would reconstruct them to explore their natural and social function for the community. The God in Dewey’s reconstruction is, however, no less powerful in function. As Rosenow admitted, it is “the unity of ideal human ends and endeavors” and the ‘true’ kingdom of this ‘God’, the reign of this ‘God’ is the realm where this activity is taking place in the social environment, “the social community which actualizes this ideal unity.”

The partnership between the prophet and the deity reconstructed speaks to the deeply human relational interactions that evolve as communities struggle for justice. Dewey claimed that “a more generous sense of inherent social relationships binding the aims of all into one comprehensive good” would develop as a result of the growth of human encounters within democratic institutions and through the increased awareness of the natural world through science. A community’s struggle for righteousness and justice would be seen not as an opportunity for one ‘superior’ group to exercise charity upon an ‘inferior’ group, but the recognition that much of the pain and misery of life is the result of social inequities that require human remedies. In social relationships, this links the concept of justice to the real life work of love and sympathy. “That human

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385 Rosenow, “The Teacher as Prophet of the True God,” 434.
nature should have justice done it under all circumstances is an infinitely complicated and difficult requirement, and only a vision of the capacities and accomplishments of human beings rooted in affection and sympathy can perceive and execute justly."\(^{387}\)

The prophet points to the ideals of unity, justice and righteousness that arise and expand into “one comprehensive good” by critically reflecting on the social relationships within the community.

Heschel calls this the anthropotropic moment. God turned toward humanity. Heschel recognizes that the prophet’s work is to reflect on the “perplexities and ambiguities of history. When the prophet speaks it is never about God in the absolute but always in relation to the people. It is an interpretation, not of divine Being, but of the divine interaction with humanity”.\(^{388}\) For Dewey, the anthropotropic moment is the prophet turned toward humanity in critical reflection upon the “perplexities and ambiguities” of an historical moment. The anthropotropic, the turning toward humanity, is an opportunity for expanding the sense of infinite connections played out in our everyday lives.

The consciousness of this encompassing infinity of connections is ideal. When a sense of the infinite reach of an act physically occurring in a small point of space and occupying a petty instant of time comes home to us, the meaning of a present act is seen to be vast, immeasurable, unthinkable. This ideal is not a goal to be attained. It is a significance to be felt, appreciated.\(^{389}\)

\(^{387}\) Ibid., 374.

\(^{388}\) Heschel, *The Prophets*, 620.

\(^{389}\) Dewey, *How We Think*, 263.
Dewey draws on the discourse of contemporary moderate Protestantism that envisioned American democratic progress as the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth. Social life was infused with a religious understanding that undogmatically, at least among liberal religious thinkers, claimed the blessings of democracy as a way to usher in the kingdom.\textsuperscript{390} There was much hope that the application of emerging social sciences and technological advances along with Christian ideals could culminate in a more democratic society. Dewey contended that the challenge of modern science would reshape traditional religion toward a “common faith” in the human activities of intelligence and experimentalism to bring about a “social health and sanity analogous to that made in behalf of physical public health.”\textsuperscript{391} As the social world expanded with opportunities for interaction and as our scientific knowledge of the natural world increased, we would come to recognize and appreciate our infinite connections. We would come to understand that our physical and social actions in a historical moment have infinite meaning and significance. For Dewey, this anthropotropism consciousness would enable humanity to solve some of its most difficult social problems.

The “small point of space” that is the school takes on a vastness, an immeasurability that moves toward the democratic social ideal for which Dewey contended. The school, in its function to enrich the process of social consciousness, is one of the spaces that embodies an active site for social reconstruction and renewal. The teacher as a “social servant set apart for... social growth”\textsuperscript{392}, is positioned as

\textsuperscript{390} Tröhler, “The ‘kingdom of God on Earth’ and Early Chicago Pragmatism,” 95–100.
\textsuperscript{391} Dewey, \textit{A Common Faith}, 81.
\textsuperscript{392} John Dewey, \textit{My Pedagogic Creed}.
prophet within this realm of activity. It is with this function that the teacher is intimately engaged. Dewey claims that the teacher “always is the prophet of the true God and the usherer in of the true kingdom of God.”\(^{393}\) The Deweyan prophetic teacher takes on the vital role of reimagining. Dewey writes in *Art as Experience* that “a sense of possibilities that are unrealized and that might be realized are put in contrast with actual conditions, the most penetrating ‘criticism’ of the latter can be made. It is by a sense of possibilities opening before us that we become aware of the constrictions that hem us in and of burdens that oppress.”\(^{394}\) The prophetic teacher is one who names what is oppressive in the actual conditions of what is the dominant consciousness of schooling and offers energizing hope by imagining an alternative. This alternative points, in Deweyan terms, to the ideal of vital democratic ways of living in opposition to the static and mechanical.

Garrison recognizes that Dewey had a preference for moral prophets who inspired democratic social hope instead of the platonic philosopher-kings.

The difference is between Plato's ideal of a static society constructed according to timeless laws and Dewey's Darwinian vision of a democracy constantly reconstructing itself and he hoped progressing. Prophets are social critics; even when they do not intend to be so, they are nonetheless uneasily recognized as prophets by powerful agents of social manipulation, control, and domination. Prophets have the capacity to penetrate the veneer of supposedly definitive actuality that constrains and oppresses us and to expose the possibilities that lie beneath it.\(^{395}\)

\(^{393}\) Ibid., 18.
\(^{394}\) Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 349.
Dewey recognized that there was great dignity in the calling of the teacher to furnish the proper environment that would offer the “essentials needed for realization of democratic ideals.” The vital democratic ideal is one that is in continual construction and is characterized by a mode of living toward an alternative consciousness of community. The school becomes this environment where democratic ways are enacted “day by day, even moment by moment. Such a mode, according to Dewey, fuels the growth of both individuals and society.” This constant imaginative, alternative enactment of democratic ways is, for Dewey, the task of ushering in the true kingdom of God. The prophetic teacher is tasked with ‘preaching’ against all that would come against the realization of democratic ways of living and being. The prophetic teacher openly criticizes static, dominant modes of schooling that oppress and repress the vital, dynamic role of democracy and offers energizing hope for ways of schooling that are compassionate and just.

The critical disposition of the Deweyan prophetic teacher calls for the task of delegitimizing the dominant consciousness of corporate schooling reform that is based on the over-quantification of individualized performance outcomes. This kind of critical delegitimizing will require a different vocabulary of learning, one that, in

broad terms, reimagines the social against neoliberal corporate individualizing.

Fitzsimmons suggests that this vocabulary…

will need to be more socially oriented and away from neoliberal instrumentalism which is centered on investment, capital, entrepreneurism, finance, efficiency, productivity, growth, structural reforms and the free market. Such capitalist vocabulary lacks human love and places the human being inside a cog that runs the machine of objectification where the learner learns to be an individual disconnected from her own humanity.  

This will also require that teachers, through this vocabulary, prepare and develop a consciousness that is socially informed and critical of the ways in which any existing and future educational reforms might serve to erode socially democratic ways or disproportionately disadvantage various groups. The prophetic teacher will work against neoliberal values that quantify, measure and sort individuals who are then separated and disconnected from the social fabric. Recognition of this existing socially corrosive tendency, which neoliberal schooling champions, Dewey claimed for the school a counteractive role. “But, most of all, the present industrial constitution of society is, like every society which has ever existed, full of inequities. It is the aim of progressive education to take part in correcting unfair privilege and unfair deprivation, not to perpetuate them.”

Prophetic teachers will question the legitimacy of the

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399 Dewey, Democracy and Education, 126.
quantifiable as the measure of all educational value and serve to transgress this ‘logic’ whenever it obscures deeper social conditions.

Delegitimizing neoliberal forms of schooling suggests a ‘protective’ role for the teacher. A consciousness sensitive to the ‘injuries’ of neoliberal schooling will make efforts to shield schools from the dehumanizing effects of the neoliberal prescription. Where the authoritarian moves of neoliberalism place profits, productivity and efficiency before people, the prophetic teacher stands in contradiction. Here I am not suggesting ‘protective’ in the sense that a parent might guard her children while the children themselves are blissfully unaware of the danger. What I mean to suggest here is that, first the prophetic teacher maintains what could be called the *Teacher’s Hippocratic Oath*, the ethical position to “keep them from harm and injustice.”⁴⁰⁰ and also the development of a pedagogy that guards the social world against the dehumanizing effects of neoliberalism. Fitzsimmons speaks of the “ideological bind that seems to incorporate education and schooling under a neoliberal umbrella” as a model that needs to be “abandoned and replaced”, indeed a pedagogy to be “overcome by its practitioner” through a countering ideological perspective driven by human solidarity.⁴⁰¹ This kind of pedagogy that ‘guards the social’ would open possibilities for resistant action within and beyond the classroom as students and teachers together stand in opposition to neoliberal ways. The idea here is not that the teacher acts for the students in protecting them, but that the teacher helps create the

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⁴⁰⁰ *The Hippocratic Oath Today — NOVA | PBS.*
conditions for protective resistance, so that students, teachers, and whoever the oppressed happen to be are the ones who collectively act. The prophetic teacher seeks a pedagogy that calls forth human beings as social subjects with agency, not objects of imperial designs.

Closely linked with the work of delegitimitizing is the other task of the Deweyan prophetic teacher which is to offer an alternative vision and call into consciousness a new social reality which enables, or “energizes”, the growth of an alternative community. This consciousness takes on the democratic dream, the vision of associated living for which Dewey contended. This vision is shaped by the politics of justice and compassion and energized by the values of intelligence and experimentalism. If is to be truly prophetic and truly Deweyan, however, it cannot be a proclamatory articulation. The prophet here is not the lone voice for this vision but a voice that adds to the work of building community consciousness and community articulations of justice and compassion. It is not prophetic because it says, “Here is the way”. The prophetic in the Deweyan frame articulates a position that says, “lets us find the way together.” This togetherness does not mean a movement for a particular social class, although it should serve to open physical and intellectual opportunities for classes that have been historically disadvantaged. A true togetherness suggests an inclusivity that takes up the dream of associated living and is deeply rooted in the broad values of democratic community. The aims for this community cannot be externally imposed but must evolve from within. The alternative community must
grow from “pockets of hope and adventurism” and be built through action from the bottom up.

Prophetic teachers arise in times of crisis. They are squeezed out from between rocks and hard places. They are community voices crying in the wilderness even as they are made voiceless mouthpieces for the empire, “throwaway workers” in an educational marketplace. Prophetic teachers are corporate threats to what William Lloyd Fridley calls “the curricular industrial complex”\(^\text{402}\), for prophets are liable to speak words that are unscripted, give assignments that are ungraded, teach lessons that go untested and offer what Noddings calls “free gifts”\(^\text{403}\). This makes theorizing from afar functionally non-prophetic, and particularly anti-Deweyan. Perhaps we can only hint at the prophetic, only provide shadowy whispers of what can only come into focus on the ground, in the fray and even go unrecognized and certainly unmeasured. The rise of the prophetic teacher is not simply recognizing that \textit{how} we teach is more important than what we teach. It is certainly that. For \textit{how} we teach, vitally and democratically, opens the door to future learning and growth. Moreover, however, the Deweyan prophetic teacher looks to the \textit{who} of teaching, recognizing the fundamentally social and relational dynamic, the essential ‘associatedness’ of educational experiences. To obscure and undermine this essential democratic quality, as neoliberal schooling works to do, is, in prophetic terms, an educational

\(^{402}\) Fridley, “Disgruntled Faculty in Five Frames: A Neo-Retro Koan Experience” OVPES unpublished conference presentation.

\(^{403}\) Noddings, \textit{Education and Democracy in the 21st Century}, 146–47.
abomination. “What avail,” says Dewey “is it to win prescribed amounts of
information…if in the process the individual loses his own soul.” For the Deweyan
Prophetic teacher democracy is neither a comfort nor a security, it is a persistent
challenge and dogged demand! For the Deweyan prophetic teacher democracy is not
an idea of one’s daydreams and wishful thinking. Democracy is a hot poker, a
continual salt pour in the wound of history, in the wound that is the neoliberal practice
of teaching.

Overcoming the neoliberal seems to be an impossible endeavor. In prophetic
terms, it is the task of holding back the waters of a mighty river. Neoliberal schooling
is just one small stream of what seems to be the global ideological common sense of
our time. The tasks of the prophetic teacher to criticize and offer an alternative vision
seem like so much screaming into the wind. The next chapter will take up the
challenge of what it means to be a Deweyan Prophetic Teacher. I will offer a
framework for the formation of a prophetic consciousness along with guiding
principles for living up to the calling of the Deweyan Prophetic Teacher.

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Chapter 5: The Prophetic Work of the Teacher

In the summer of 1984 I took on my first teaching assignment at my church’s summer vacation bible school. I was 18 and had just graduated from high school. It’s difficult now to recall any particular educational moment in that brief week of teaching. I have vague memories of sitting around a table with several third and fourth graders and feeling a sense of irony in that just a few years earlier I had been that disinterested boy who just wanted to be outside playing instead of being in ‘school’.

That summer I was working at a wholesale hardware warehouse as a stock boy and sometimes truck driver delivering nuts and bolts and screwdrivers and hammers to local hardware stores. I had no idea what I really wanted to do with my life. My mother encouraged me to go to art school and I don’t remember my dad giving me any particular advice about my future plans. A friend of my mother worked as a corporate secretary at an engineering firm in downtown Baltimore. She mentioned that her firm often hired draftsman’s apprentices and she encouraged me to fill out an application which she would deliver directly to her boss. I was soon granted an interview. Looking all important I toted in my black zippered art portfolio and showed off my high school collection of cartoons, pencil sketches and drawings collected perhaps for some future art career. They were most impressed by my lettering ability and considered that I had the raw skills needed to transfer the sketches and technical
drawings of engineers on to the clear plastic film needed to make blueprints. These were the foundational skills of a draftsman, skills that Computer Aided Design (CAD) would soon make obsolete.

Soon I was wearing a dress shirt and tie, parking in my own numbered parking space and taking the elevator to the sixth floor civil engineering department. My tilted drafting desk was one of many in an open floor space with enclosed offices at each corner of the floor. The draftsman in front of me was a very friendly round mustachioed balding man named Art who I imagined was in his late forties. I noticed soon after I settled in that Art had a condition that was not unusual in an office of men hunched over drafting desks for hours a day, years on end. Their elbows where heavily calloused. I was still in training and as days and weeks and months proceeded I learned the lettering and drawing skills I needed to get some of my own projects working directly with a particular engineer to develop plans and blueprints for one small part of a larger development plan. The piped in office music would play in the background, the weather changed outside my window. I would often look around the office floor and watch the men at their desks, hunched over on their elbows, staring at their drawings. As my gaze turned toward Art he would often be looking back at me. With a playful frown on his face he would motion his sausage finger down toward the desk and in silence convey the company value: get back to work, hunch back over, elbows to the table, stop looking around. Art would often catch me looking out the window and he would playfully clear his throat and point his finger toward the desk:
Get back to work. I would smile. He would smile. And we would hunch over our desks.

Instead of taking night courses paid for by the company to become an elbow calloused, hunched engineer, the next summer I left for college, still not knowing exactly what I wanted to do with my life. I was convinced however that callousing my elbows on a desk for the next 30 years was not in my future. My first year of classes was filled with the typical general education courses. With a bit of a lack luster beginning I came home for the summer still in a fog about ‘my future.’ I returned to college in the fall with a semester load of those general classes hoping I would soon ‘figure it out.’ A few weeks into the semester I passed by a classroom just as some lingering students were ambling out into the hallway deep in lively discussion. I paused to make way for their procession and was astonished to recognize a familiar face at the end of the line. “Mrs. Morrow?” I said. “Yes”, she answered with the familiar deep smoothness I had remembered. “Mrs. Morrow who taught 2nd grade at Babson Park Elementary?” For the last several years she had been teaching college courses in the Teacher Education department. It was now ‘Dr.’ Morrow and perhaps more astonishingly, she remembered my name! The next semester as I sat in her class as her student again I remember feeling a sense of amazement and wonder about our unique connection as student and teacher. It was as if two lines of a large circle had come together. I still wonder how she experienced it. The serendipitous encounter with Dr. Morrow began a deep reflection upon the influence of all the teachers in my life.
Mrs. Kindel, my father’s kindergarten teacher had become mine. Mrs. Joyner, my first grade teacher, wore painted on eyebrows and a gray beehive of hair. She marched disapprovingly between the desks, always on high alert for misbehavior. Feeling the weight of her hand and the rings of her fingers on the top of your head was enough to quell any childhood excitability. Mrs. Fennel was my 3rd grade teacher when our classmate Mike was hit by a car after school and eventually died. I still remember her eyes filled with tears as she comforted our class the next day. My sixth grade science teacher, Mrs. Tomlin, trusted us to go outside and discover the natural world. Mrs. Brent, my English teacher that year, discovered, through the efforts of Wesley Jones, that I had used my artistic talents to draw a ‘dirty’ picture. She addressed the entire class that day. She was obviously deeply hurt. It took me a few moments to realize what she was referring to. My face flushed with heat and I felt sick as I slumped down in my chair. She never glanced my way or mentioned my name to embarrass me. Nothing was ever mentioned again. I gained a deep love and respect for her that day. I wanted sink deep into her arms and apologize but thought at twelve years old I’d outgrown such an intimate gesture.

My high school woodshop teacher, Mr. Kotterwaus, seeded in me a lifelong love of woodworking. But more, he taught me the virtues of persistence and attention to detail. He would glide his giant thumb across the end grain of my project and without words invite more sanding. Mr. Fayman, through his infectious enthusiasm for Huckleberry Finn, inspired me to read, though he would not have known that from my grade and performance in his class. That seed would not bloom for another ten years.
when a chance encounter with a high school friend stirred memories. I returned to Finn, with Mr. Fayman as my muse, and began what became an enduring love of reading. Thank you Mr. Fayman, after all.

When I reflect on the words of John Dewey when he calls teachers “prophets” I recall these beloved teachers and many more. Heschel called the prophets “the most disturbing people who have ever lived… the [people] whose image is our refuge in distress, and whose voice and vision sustain our faith.” My teachers are the people who continue to ‘disturb’ me, the prophets in my life who have nurtured and shaped my life in ways that continue to offer me strength, vision, and hope to this day. Dewey recognized these moral and ethical aspects as central to the “high calling” of teaching and labeled this work prophetic.

My teachers most certainly did not see a teacher in me. I was not the kind of student to show such destiny. I certainly did not envision it for myself in those days. I would like to say that I came to the public school classroom because, like David Hursh, I imagined that “teaching could be part of a larger effort to create a more humane world.” But more personally I began teaching because I discovered that of all the people who may have made the first 18 years of my life “formative”, beyond I suppose the influence of immediate family, was this brigade of teachers who tag-teamed me along toward adulthood. On graduation day I was, of course, oblivious to their handiwork in me. I thought it was my achievement to be celebrated, or at least

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406 Hursh, High Stakes Testing, 6.
relieved to be completed, never thinking that my days of schooling would only be beginning. Only much later did I recognize and continue to come to understand not only their work in me then but more astounding perhaps is their continuing work in me. The fact that the human chimes they rang, most often imperceptible to my childhood ears, continue to reverberate in me as a living source of hope and inspiration, speaks to the power of the teaching life. I want to claim that this is the prophetic power of teaching.

This powerful relational component of teaching is what Dewey meant when he called teachers prophets. This ‘social’ role of teachers, a role that opens wider possibilities for democratic life, I think, is the core motivation for teaching, the heart of teaching, the moral import of the teaching profession that has been reduced to the imperceptible, dissolving in the neoliberal swamp of quantification, standardization, and top down “reform”. Though assaults on teachers and the teaching profession are not new, current “reform” policies have served to degrade teachers and the work of teaching to a narrow focus on one measure of so-called teaching effectiveness: The test score. The work to embarrass, undermine, and deskill teachers in an effort to improve test scores has served to limit the prophetic power of teaching and the vision of democratic ways of living. Conspicuously absent in my memory is any particular academic lesson much less any test score that my teachers helped me achieve. Conspicuously absent in Dewey’s democratic vision of teaching is any end game that results in improved test scores.
It is difficult to imagine that any of my teachers recognized their influential work in me. Perhaps they did but I was certainly unaware. They may have simply operated with a faith that what they were doing was making a difference. Somehow and someday. I imagine that they struggled, like all teachers, to find meaning and purpose in their work while recognizing the unknowability of the results of their actions. Did they act in some intentional ways to live out this prophetic function? Or, as Dewey seems to suggest, is it in the very nature of the teaching profession? “The work of the teacher remains thus, forever, a frontier task. Always the teacher must deal with life at its point of becoming. What has been and what is are the raw materials out of which students and teachers must create what is to be.”

This seems to me to be the essence of the teaching task. This is the space that teachers occupy and as it turns out it is an overlapping space of the prophet. It is this embodied space that is prophetic, dealing with life at the point of becoming, taking what is and what has been and creating what is to be is indeed the prophetic task.

Beyond the kind of personal ways that my teachers poured their life into mine and were a part of my becoming, are there ways that teachers can operate intentionally to take up the prophetic role? Does our current path of neoliberal schooling call for teachers to do something different, something more intentional? Dewey also wondered, given his historical moment, if something more intentional should be done. “This work, then, which the schools have done spontaneously, without much set

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purpose or intention, in the past, has now got to be done, it seems to me, in a much more conscious and deliberate manner, or it will not be done at all." ⁴⁰⁸ The primary work of the school, for Dewey, was social unity; the “cement in the social structure” … “the shuttle which has carried the threads across and woven the otherwise separate threads into a coherent pattern.” ⁴⁰⁹ There are obvious parallels between the educational shifts to which Dewey contended and today. Dewey wrestled with what he considered to be the socially corrosive effects of standardization, quantification, and narrowed educational aims that seemed to exclude all but the economic. His critique of the educational situation was an outgrowth of a broader indictment of American culture as whole. “We seem to find everywhere a hardness, a tightness, a clamping down of the lid, a regimentation and standardization, a devotion to efficiency and prosperity of a mechanical and quantitative sort.” (LW3, 134) In many ways then, my call for a renewed vision of teachers and teaching is not dissimilar from the essence of Dewey’s educational work.

For all of the messianic overtones that come with speaking of prophets and ushering in kingdoms, I hope to make clear that prophetic teachers alone will not save us from our current neoliberal quagmire. Working toward a Deweyan vision of democratic schools as central to the work of developing a democratic society would require a monumental engagement of a broad spectrum of governmental and community actors. My focus on the prophetic teacher can be one aspect of that broader

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid.
vision and seeks to work toward answering one of Dewey’s questions regarding the problem of teaching. What can be done? Dewey asks, “What can be done to liberate teachers, to free their personalities and minds from all the petty economic, social and administrative restrictions which so frequently hem them in and repress them?” I, like Dewey, recognize the critical place and calling of teachers in schools. He agrees that “As are the teachers, so are the schools” but is careful not to isolate teachers by making them solely responsible for “what is the matter with teaching”. Instead he looks to the conditions of the community and the society toward an examination of “ourselves” that would uncover the pressures of social ideals, desires, and beliefs that shape schools and the teaching environment. By placing the emphasis on the prophetic nature of teaching I hope to contribute primarily to the liberation of teachers and the work of teaching in classrooms that open possibilities for living democratically in a teaching world that has been dramatically reshaped by neoliberalism. By understanding teaching and teachers as prophetic I hope to provide a visionary framework whereby teachers can work to undo the undemocratic and dehumanizing work that neoliberal forms of schooling have done.

It is not only the position of the teacher as a prophet; perhaps Dewey is right about the position of the teacher no matter what the social and political context might be. The important nuance here is the recognition of the message of the prophet. Clearly a message here is not confined to the verbal, but a message in an expansive

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sense that is inclusive of all forms of communicative experience and action. The question for me is more than whether or not teaching occupies the space of becoming, but whether the message in that space is ultimately a humanizing message or one which dehumanizes, one that opens opportunities for human flourishing or closes them off. Dewey’s famous quote claims that the kind of message is critical, “The conception of education as a social process and function has no meaning until we define the kind of society we have in mind.” The space and the message here are not mutually exclusive, however, they are concepts that compliment and nourish one another. The frontier position of the teacher at the point of becoming is fertile space for the message of democracy. The democratic values of liberty, equality, and community emerge in the individual, shaping one’s sense of self in relation to others. The message, actions, values and commitments of democracy can only expand the space of becoming, opening more robust possibilities for social interactions that work toward democratic living.

Indeed, Dewey refers to the teacher as the prophet of the true God. However, as previously discussed, Dewey’s prophetic teacher is not the prophet of a being that exists outside of the natural world. The Deweyan prophetic teacher is not the mouthpiece for any particular religion or its god. The prophet of Dewey’s true God does not mediate or relay ultimate messages from a supernatural realm. Dewey’s true God is of course a functional relationship that is taken up in the process of uniting the

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ideal with the actual. The ever evolving distance between the actual conditions of our everyday experience and our better vision for the future is the location of this process. The ideal for Dewey is deep democratic ways of living. “Dewey identifies the reality of God in today’s world with the creative democratic life and all the natural conditions that support it.” The prophet therefore takes up this function, dives in to this interchange. The Deweyan prophet is thrown upon the imbalance of this endeavor to speak for, work for, and strive for all that brings about and sustains democratic life. A brief look at how Dewey understands the commitments of democracy will assist in working out the intellectual space and message of the prophetic teacher.

Dewey situates his understanding of democracy and democratic life within his broader notion of the role of philosophy. Dewey’s reconstructive view of philosophy is that is it not a form of knowledge to be obtained nor a set of ideal principles to be secured for all time. Dewey recognizes philosophy as a form of moral action in the world that derives from the very etymology of the word philosophy: the love of wisdom. This love of wisdom is not simply the capturing of some grand thought that serves as an untouchable ideal. The love of wisdom requires continual reflection, experimentation, and action. A philosophy so construed is, for Dewey, “an intellectualized wish, an aspiration subjected to rational discriminations and tests, a social hope reduced to a working program of action, a prophecy of the future, but one disciplined by serious thought and knowledge.” Philosophy leads us to ask

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412 Rockefeller, John Dewey, 520.
questions about future action. What must we do now? How then shall we live? It is moral because wisdom is not a term that refers to a particular set of principles nor a form of concrete knowledge. Wisdom is an action that encompasses our "most passionate desires and hopes", our "basic beliefs about the sort of life to be lived."

Wisdom is a moral term because it entails "a choice about something to be done, a preference for living this sort of life rather than that. It refers not to accomplished reality but to a desired future which our desires, when translated into articulate conviction, may help bring into existence."

With philosophy that is recognized as the action of wisdom to choose a particular vision of life rather than another vision of life Dewey is able to show the intimate connection between philosophy and democracy.

Dewey recognizes the contested nature of democracy as a political form. Democracy’s connection to philosophy comes in the recognition that "democracy is a form of desire and endeavor" that points to an anticipated vision of the world. The openness and contestability of democracy still allows us, as Wendy Brown suggests, "to release democracy from containment by any particular form while insisting on its value in connoting political self-rule by the people, whoever the people are." For Dewey, the historic liberal democratic commitments to liberty, equality and fraternity are rooted in philosophical commitments that arise from our "most passionate desires and hopes", our "basic

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414 Ibid., 44.
415 Ibid., 49.
beliefs about the sort of life to be lived.” This links philosophy as a mode active wisdom to democracy as a mode of associated living. Dewey reflects on the values of liberty, equality, and fraternity as the philosophical underpinnings of democracy.

The philosophical implications of liberty claim contingency and uncertainty in a world that is always in the making. Real freedom to make choices and make mistakes requires a world where perfection and completeness is forever elusive. Liberty is only formulated where there is a “genuine field of novelty, of real and unpredictable increments to existence, a field for experimentation and invention.”

Where experimentation and invention are genuine aspects of the life of liberty, discovery is made true not only on the basis of striving but through the process of inevitable error. The inevitability of error becomes the basis for deliberative communication toward fruitful revelations of future action that are inextricably tied to the moral. Wisdom, in Dewey’s view, as moral action to choose one vision of life rather than another, can only be enacted in the world under the conditions of genuine liberty.

The democratic commitment to equality is based on a philosophy of individuality. For Dewey, “the cause of democracy is bound up with development of the intellectual capacities of each member of society.” The individual is not a quantifiable entity that can be sorted and fixed in a particular moral or social position. The individuality of a person is the “manifestation of something irreplaceable” in

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quality not quantity. Dewey’s understanding of individuality rejects the traditional atomistic individualism of quantities and the immorality of hierarchical relationships. This philosophy of individuality precludes notions of superiority and inferiority especially in terms of supreme or ultimate truth that has traditionally served to advantage hierarchies. Dewey recognizes that democracy has struggled in practice due to the strength of surrounding philosophies so committed to “the principle of a single, final and unalterable authority.”

Individuality and equality for democracy means “that the world is not to be construed as a fixed order of species, grades or degrees. It means that every existence deserving the name of existence has something unique and irreplaceable about it, that it does not exist to illustrate a principle, to realize a universal or to embody a kind or class.” Equality is fed by the qualitative uniqueness and irreplaceability of each individual. Dewey recognizes this as the moral cause of democracy itself. He writes:

…the cause of democracy is the moral cause of the dignity and the worth of the individual. Through mutual respect, mutual toleration, give and take, the pooling of experiences, it is ultimately the only method by which human beings can succeed in carrying on this experiment in which we are all engaged, whether we want to be or not, the greatest experiment of humanity—that of living together in ways in which the life of each of us is at once profitable in the deepest sense of the word, profitable to himself and helpful in the building up of the individuality of others.  

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420 Ibid.
Fraternity as the act of *living together* in ways that are mutually “profitable” is the kind of “associated living” that is the basis of Dewey’s understanding of democracy. The irony of “profitable in the deepest sense of the word” suggests Dewey’s focus on the qualitative value of life together in contrast to any form of pecuniary valuation of social relationships. Dewey sees fraternity as the continuity of individuality, “as association and interaction without limit.” Fraternity is the recognition that equality and individuality do not act to isolate individuals but serves to ultimately integrate and associate them yet without dissolving individuality. “Democracy, says Dewey, “is concerned not with freaks or geniuses or heroes or divine leaders but with associated individuals in which each by intercourse with others somehow makes the life of each more distinctive.” A concern with an individuality that arises from social interaction, democracy is a fraternal ideal, a social ideal concerned to promote “profitable” conditions for life together. Dewey recognizes that democracy’s commitment to fraternity creates a contradiction in that the work to establish social arrangements that promote the common good often impinge on the liberty of the individual. “‘Liberty and Equality’ represent the values which belong to individuals in their severalty, their distinction from one another; ‘Fraternity’ represents the value that belongs to them in their relations with one another. All history proves, however, that there is no automatic equation of liberty and fraternity with each other.” In the absence of automatic equations, Dewey reiterates his broad faith in

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the nature and ongoing processes of democracy as a form of associated life. “Because it is something to be accomplished by human planning and arrangement, it involves constant meeting and solving of problems—that is to say, the desired harmony never is brought about in a way which meets and forestalls all future developments.” The contradictions that democracy brings to its commitment to fraternity becomes the occasion for continuing communication and growth that is the hard work for a society determined toward democratic ways of living.

The associatedness, the human interaction and connections of democratic living and democracy’s commitments to liberty, equality and fraternity are ideals that function on the level of the experimental as a condition of community life. In Dewey’s terms, ideals signify “something to be done rather than something already given.” What is to be done is the work to harmonize democracy’s commitments. It is the social work of continual experimentation through cooperative voluntary processes of communication as a condition and a result of community. The community that takes up this endeavor is as Rosenow has claimed, “the social community which actualizes this ideal unity.” Although Rosenow may be confining his terminology to his own concerns to explicate the nature of Dewey’s “god”, as the “unity of the ideal and the actual,” Dewey’s broader focus is the function of a democratic community to operationalize their ideals. It is not that communities actualize democracy, as if democracy stood as something external to be obtained or applied, something to arrive

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425 Ibid., 350.
426 Ibid.
427 Rosenow, “The Teacher as Prophet of the True God,” 434.
at, but that communities progress experimentally by continuous readjustment and thereby become more democratic. As Boisvert suggests, “…it would be better to speak of societies attempting to become more and more democratic, struggling against the ever-present forces which tempt them away from the further realization of democratic ideals.” 428

Dewey’s criterion for the democratic community is one which is characterized by a strong recognition of mutual interests that shape group action, what he calls “interpenetrating” interests and a ‘habitual’ form of social readjustment as a result of continuous open interaction and communication.429 Social readjustment is a continuous and evolving habit of progression. To generate this type of community, to promote this kind of social life, for Dewey necessitated a communicative environment of embodied individuals who struggled together to bring about social progress.

Signs and symbols, language, are the means of communication by which a fraternally shared experience is ushered in and sustained. But the winged words of conversation in immediate intercourse have a vital import lacking in the fixed and frozen words of written speech. Systematic and continuous inquiry into all the conditions which affect association and their dissemination in print is a precondition of the creation of a true public. But it and its results are but tools after all. Their final actuality is accomplished in face-to-face relationships by means of direct give and take.430

428 Boisvert, John Dewey, 106.
Here is where Dewey can make his strongest appeal for the relationship between democracy and education. A democratic community, in light of its interests have a greater concern for education than other types of communities.

The ideal of democracy demands the fullest possible development of personality in all—irrespective of birth, wealth, creed, or race—through cooperative association with others, and mutual understanding and consent. The ideal further demands that all the institutions, customs, and arrangements of social life shall contribute to these ends, that is, that they shall be educative.431

As Richard Pring claims for Dewey, “The link between education and democracy is… the creation of a space where the experiences of each and every learner would be respected and become the object of the communicative process.”432 But more, as explored in the previous chapter, Dewey can bring together his vision of unified existence. His understanding of democracy, as the unity of life together, religious experience as the unification of the self with nature, and the work of schools as a unifying social institution.

Democracy, therefore, is at the centre of Dewey’s moral conception of education (a secular realization of this kingdom of God on earth) and is deeper and wider than any political arrangement. Democracy is a deep and active communication between individuals. It welcomes and sustains diversity of experience and background. It reflects the constant attempt to break down the barriers that inhibit communication—those of social class, racial stereotyping or selective schooling.433

432 Pring, John Dewey, 118–19.
433 Ibid., 119.
This democratic conception of schools was, for Dewey, as I explored in the previous chapter, the “religious” work of schools. It was not a “secular realization” as Pring suggests, but a unification toward the operational conditions of the kingdom of God which Dewey envisioned as the democratic society. Schools in their unifying social work could be the embryonic democratic communities that provide the environment for furthering democratic societies. Teachers in this context become the prophets of the democratic ways of living and being as Dewey envisioned.

The teacher’s task of prophetic witness to democratic ways of living and being is fraught with struggle and ambiguity. Educational vision abounds and the prophetic messages that will bring ‘salvation’ to the system are commercialized in the next available curricular advancement aligned to the knowledge standards for the next generation. How, indeed, do we know if the words of the prophets are ‘true’? How can we determine the ‘truth’ of their vision? Are the claims of ‘true’ and ‘false’ prophecy simply two different ideological positions that cannot be arbitrated, simply two available visions of the world? How can we know which vision of the world is valid? How can we determine ‘true’ prophets from ‘false’ prophets? Is the authenticity of the prophetic message simply unavailable but in hindsight? Were their signs at the outset that the ‘prophecy’ of NCLB and other corporate reforms would, in practice, lead to greater inequality and the dismantling of public schooling? The problem of discerning the true from the false prophet has and continues to be a biblical and theological problem within religious communities and for biblical interpreters. As previously explored, the traditional understanding of the prophetic and its function, particularly...
within the literary text of the Bible, is that the prophet speaks for the divine. The
prophet is considered the ‘mouthpiece’ of God. Walter Moberly’s work, *Prophecy and
Discernment*, raises the question of authenticity particularly within the context of the
biblical book of Jeremiah. Here the biblical text itself raises the question as Jeremiah
the prophet speaks against the ‘false’ prophets. On a literary level, we have this
precedent in that redactors have made this judgement for us through the canonizing
process. Redactors have judged the validity of the prophet’s words based on historical
hindsight. Can it be determined, however, which vision, if any, has authoritative
power in the historical moment? And what is the basis of the prophet’s authority?
Moberly rightly suggests that:

One should not, however, speak of the importance of the concept of
prophecy without simultaneously recognizing that it also offers massive
potential for abuse. The appeal to God may be not only deception of
self but also a potent tool for manipulation of others. It can be a means
to validate human self-will and imposition upon others, with endless
more or less subtle variations upon the theme of ‘You must do what I
say, because what I say is what God says,’ where the appeal to divine
authority can serve to prevent or override legitimate question or
objection.\(^{434}\)

Dewey solves the problem of the appeal to God in some sense by his exclusion
of the supernatural. This is not unlike specific attempts to solve the problem as
suggested by Moberly when one views prophecy through the lens of psychology and
sociology as a very human phenomenon. This considers the question of the origin of

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\(^{434}\) Moberly, *Prophecy and Discernment*, 12.
prophetic authority: Who or what is the ‘higher’ authority that drives the prophet? Are there some criteria for judging prophetic ‘authenticity’ or ‘authority’? Can we say that the religious discernment of truth looks at whether or not the ‘word’ is from God based upon whether that ‘word’ aligns with the character of God? But this of course does not remove its manipulative potential. There are various visions of God’s character which include wrath, vengeance, tribalism, and jealousy. These, it can be argued, are integral parts of the biblical narrative. The traditional theological characteristics of an “all powerful, all knowing” god only complicate our dilemma. Moberly formulates some criteria for discernment that, in collaboration with a Deweyan perspective, may provide a way to determine prophetic truth in relation to teachers as prophets of democracy.

To develop the criteria for prophetic authenticity Moberly focuses on the specific pericope of Jeremiah 23:9-22. To avoid the repetition of his entire argument, I will include his summary statement concerning his criteria:

First, there is a lack of integrity in the character and conduct of the [false] prophets (verses 10, 11, 14a). Secondly, they fail to try to turn evildoers from their ways, indeed they positively encourage them to be morally complacent (verses 14b, 17, 22). Thirdly, their message originates within themselves and is not from YHWH, for they have not stood in the divine council (Verses 16, 18, 21, 22).\textsuperscript{435}

\textsuperscript{435} Ibid., 75–76.
Moberly concedes that the first two criteria, though generally discernable, are heavily dependent upon the third. And with the third criteria are we not brought back full circle to our original dilemma? How do we determine if the prophet has “stood in the divine council”? How can we determine whether the message from the prophet is an “authentic” message or one which simply “originates within themselves”? To address this question Moberly points to the broad understanding of council within the prophetic tradition.

The Hebrew term sod, multi-nuanced and difficult to translate, here probably means ‘council’, and so may imaginatively depict YHWH as a monarch surrounded by advisers and messengers, the kind of picture that is utilized by Miciah ben Imlah (1 Kings 22:19-22). But sod also more generally indicates a gathering of people (Jer. 15:17). And by extension the kind of understanding that characterizes those who are intimate with one another (Prov. 25:9).436

The intimacy of this ‘council’ as the third criterion for deliberation and decision making also points back to the integrity of the prophet and the moral content of the message. Moberly concludes:

…the all-important claim to be from God—to have stood in the divine council, to be sent, to speak YHWH’s word(s)—is to speak of a divine realm that is not vacuous, for the reason that it is the prophet’s lifestyle and message, whose moral character are open to scrutiny in the present, which give content to the claim about God. The ‘spiritual’ nature of the prophetic message, whether or not it is from God, is determined by its ‘moral’ content and accompaniment. Claims about the invisible spiritual realm are validated (or not) by the content of the visible and accessible realm of character, conduct, and priorities.437

436 Ibid., 74. (emphasis on ‘gathering of people’ added).
437 Ibid., 81.
Though Dewey’s pragmatism would argue that the “visible and accessible realm of character, conduct, and priorities” have moral content of their own and do not ‘validate’ an a priori spiritual realm in need of ‘earthly’ incarnation. As Moberly suggests, the message of God has moral content not disconnected from human existence. For the prophet Jeremiah the criteria are based on the human application of justice and righteousness. The question for us remains. Can we develop a criteria of discernment for the prophet of democracy? If indeed democracy has an ethic, then democracy’s “character, conduct, and priorities” should provide us with a place to begin.

Dewey clearly understands that democracy has an ethics. “Democracy in a word, is a social, that is to say, an ethical conception, and upon its ethical significance is based its significance as governmental. Democracy is a form of government only because it is a form of moral and spiritual association.” 438 This moral and spiritual association in which the development of individuality is based upon the commitments of liberty, equality, and fraternity make up the criteria for democratic community. Again Dewey saw democratic associative living in its unifying social function.

The idea of democracy, the ideas of liberty, equality, and fraternity, represent a society in which the distinction between the spiritual and the secular has ceased, and as in Greek theory, as in the Christian theory of the Kingdom of God, the church and the state, the divine and the human organization of society are one. 439

439 Ibid., 248.
The ‘moral’ content of democracy suggests a criterion for determining prophetic authenticity. In the cacophony of educational voices, in the midst of a host of educational prophets vying for the hearts and minds (and dollars) of the public, which educational vision is true to a society that calls itself democratic? The following is a proposal for discerning the true from the false prophet, a proposal I am referring to as an Emerging Criteria for Democratic Prophetic Discernment.

Emerging Criteria for Democratic Prophetic Discernment.

1. The Criterion of Prophetic Origin

When the words of the educational ‘prophets’ come down, whether in the form of broad national policy proposals or from administrative edicts at the local level, the first question to ask is, “From whence does this ‘policy’ originate?” This question is focused to determine who and from what perspective the message derives. Who developed the policy and what position do they occupy? This criterion seeks to locate the ‘message’ as originating from the prophetic space, the point of becoming that is the position of the teacher. Dewey spoke clearly concerning the gap between theory and practice recognizing that teachers must take a more active role in the making of educational theory through their practice. For Dewey, teachers should not be clerks and cooks filling out the recipes of administrators and policy makers from above. “The real cook is the one who originates all the improved dishes… the permanent improvements in the course of study must be those which are either contributed to, tested by, worked out, experimented upon intelligently by the teacher in the
He admonished that taking teaching and learning theory from sources outside of the crucial space between the teacher and the student is like “looking through the wrong end of the telescope.” It is within the space between teacher and student that the actual work of learning is done and teachers who do this actual work should play an active role in forwarding theory and policy.

The growing and strengthening coerciveness of top-down educational policy so external to the prophetic space of the teacher is cause to question its validity. Much of educational policy is made by business elites, developed and administered by policy makers with little or in most cases no classroom teaching experience. The “true” prophetic message must originate from the prophetic space, the point of becoming for teacher and student. It must show a recognition of the past and present as raw material for the future. It must have direct intellectual and practical ties to the space between teacher and student showing that they are co-creators of what is to be. To the extent that policy and educational practice rises from the creative intellectual space between teachers and students they become more authentically prophetic. Prophecy becomes invalid and false to the extent that it is separated from this space. False prophecies are pre-packaged, pre-created, and handed down from above.

2. The Criterion of Community Council

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441 Ibid.
The second criteria also concerns origination. Here, however, the question is whether the ‘message’ is a product of the process of democratic community life. To mirror the sentiments of Jeremiah, is it apparent that the prophet has spent time in the council of the *demos*? Is the message a product of the face to face, give and take of personal relationships, and this is critical, *with* the people who matter the most? This is the conception of community where each individual is conscious of their responsibilities to one another and take an active role in sharing in the solving of social problems. Time in the council of the demos suggests the kind of participatory democracy Dewey envisioned at the heart of social life. So much of ‘prophetic’ educational policy is enacted on communities instead of policy that is grounded in personal relationships and social interactions that could make it legitimate. As Benjamin Barber confirms of Dewey’s vision, “… what distinguishes truth, inasmuch as we can have it at all, from untruth, is not conformity to society’s historical traditions or the standards of independent reason or the dictates of some learned canon, but conformity to communicative processes that are genuinely democratic and that occur only in free communities.” The truth of educational prophecy emerges from the communicative interaction within communities. To the extent that this communal communicative process is bypassed by the imposition of external prophecies of educational ‘salvation’ it becomes more illegitimate, invalid, and untrue.

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3. The Criterion of Democratic Commitment

The third criteria for determining the authenticity of the prophetic is whether it reflects the democratic commitments of liberty, equality, and fraternity. Does it reflect the democratic ethos? Does the message of the prophet align with the “character, conduct, and priorities” of democracy? Does it have democratic integrity? The commitment to liberty requires that the message is born of genuine choice and has been the result of a process of true discovery. Democratic liberty acknowledges the unfinished nature of truth, always open to question and objection, forever in need of revision and experimentation. This is in contrast to a kind of policy and curricular frame that “hardens and deadens” educational endeavors with so much prepackaged information “thinking we have educated when we have simply given information about something.”443 The liberties of “dissent, deviance, political heterogeneity, and individuality” are essential components of a thriving democracy that cannot be excluded from the policies that drive our educational system.444

The democratic commitment to equality, as discussed earlier, cannot be construed on the basis of quantification. Equality is a qualitative vision of intrinsic value. As Dewey writes, “Equality denotes the unhampered share which each individual member of the community has in the consequences of associated action. It is equitable because it is measured only by need and capacity to utilize, not by

extraneous factors which deprive one in order that another may take and have.” The notion of equality tends to become a notion of quantification especially when it is viewed from afar, outside of the social relationships of community. Equality within community is the recognition of intrinsic value in spite of any physical or intellectual differences. Teachers fully recognize that their students are more than test scores, more than numbers that identify their value-added.

The authenticity of the prophetic message should be judged by its commitment to fraternity. For Dewey, fraternity is “the will to work together; it is the essence of cooperation.” Fraternity is the commitment to community and the other within that community. True prophets reveal the connection we share as humans, irrespective of social barriers and divisions and seeks to tear down walls of separation. Awareness of our human connection becomes the basis for cooperative liberation for all, not a competitive race to the top where there are winners and losers. Dewey recognized that within our communal relationship “fraternity is another name for the consciously appreciated goods which accrue from an association in which all share, and which give direction to the conduct of each.” An appreciation for communal sharing leads one to act in ways that show responsibility for one’s fellow community members. To the extent that prophecy places human individuals and communities in competition for instead of cooperation in the securing of basic human needs it becomes false.

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The conceptions …traditionally associated with the idea of democracy take on a veridical and directive meaning only when they are construed as marks and traits of an association which realizes the defining characteristics of a community. Fraternity, liberty and equality isolated from communal life are hopeless abstractions.448

For Dewey, true community life was itself democratic. Without life in community, democratic commitments have no meaning or value.

These criteria can be summarized in three questions: 1. Does the prophet’s message ordinate and arise from the personal interactions of teachers and students? 2. Does the prophet’s message reflect the council of the demos? And 3. Does the prophet’s message show commitment to the democratic ethos?

The Criteria as Guidelines for Classroom Practice: Curriculum and Classroom Life

The student teachers I work with come to the clinical student teaching experience with two primary concerns. One is foremost in their minds and the other quickly becomes apparent. Foremost is their concern with classroom ‘management.’ The ‘management’ of behaviors (misbehaviors) is often, as Dewey recognized, perceived as something too disconnected from the learning conditions of the classroom environment. The other concern has to do with curriculum. Student teachers in recent years come to the clinical experience with an overconfidence, though perhaps

448 Ibid.
well founded, in their content knowledge. Their programs of study have given them a strong basis of content knowledge concerning their area of specialization. Many too, have ‘perfected’ the mechanics of lesson planning. What becomes apparent, however, is the gulf between content knowledge and the wisdom to teach. Student teachers soon have a visceral recognition that the practice of teaching is more than just a matter of transferring content. Teaching is more than engaging students with what you know.

**Curriculum**

Dewey’s general idea concerning the role of the teacher and curriculum is that the teacher should attend to the space between the child’s interest and the curricula. The teacher’s work is not to devise some plan to motivate the learner so that they will ‘learn the material’ but the work of the teacher is to create the conditions whereby students are themselves motivated to learn. As Freire suggests, “…one of the tasks of the educator is also to provoke the *discovering* of the need for knowing and never to impose the knowledge whose need was not yet perceived.”

The following are guiding questions linked to the criteria.

**Criteria 1: Prophetic Origin**

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449 Horton and Freire, *We Make the Road by Walking*, 66.
What work has been done to observe and investigate student concerns and interests?
Do these learning goals reflect the concerns and interests of students? How have students been included in the development of learning goals? What teacher/student relational issues block student interests? What relational issues can enhance interest?
What collateral learning is going on? What is the student learning about learning?

Criteria 2: Community Council

Do curricular materials or lessons align with or reflect community concerns? How might the curriculum work toward developing social consciousness? Is there a development of cooperativeness around community concerns? How might lessons focus on the unity of race and class? Do parents and community members have dialogical access to curricular input? Do parents more than just know what their children are learning but do they share a sense of authority-authorship when it comes to the stuff of learning? Is the wider community connected to the goings on of the classroom? What parental and community knowledge is being accessed?

Criteria 3: Democratic Commitment

Is there a sense of Democratic ethos? Is learning directed toward true liberty and discovery? Or are the goals predetermined and closed? (once you learn this you are proficient). Is there space to roam intellectually? Does the process recognize
individuality and equality as a qualitative value not quantitative? Is there room for individual expression or must each student come to the same conclusion in order to be ‘correct’? Do the learning goals reflect a commitment to social ties? Do they develop social consciousness, an awareness of responsibilities to ourselves and to our community? Do students have the opportunity to solve social problems or is there an expectation of citizenship that just has them vote for others to solve the problems? Is citizenship conceived in its widest configuration as an inclusive view of community and our responsibilities to and for one another?

**Classroom Life.**

The prophetic criterion can also be applied to Classroom life. As Dewey understood it, the classroom learning environment was an integration. Curricular interest aligned with student interest suggested that issues of behavior would be organic to the learning environment—students who are engaged in their own learning need no behavior ‘plan’ added on as an external incentive. But just in case there are gaps in this ideal integration, there are certain procedures and classroom norms that can be discussed, expectations that can be worked out together. Here is where the criteria can be formative.
Criteria 1: Prophetic Origin

Do student behavior expectations, and the addressing of misbehavior in classrooms connect to the teacher student relationship? Has trust and care been maintained in developing the space of becoming between the teacher and the student? How have students been involved in the development of classroom life?

Criteria 2: Community Council

Do classroom procedures and ways of being reflect the council of the demos? Is there student voice and participation in developing classroom life? Has there been parental engagement with the development of classroom life? Is there attention to collateral learning—what are students learning about how to get along, how to treat others, how to solve problems, how to forgive? Does classroom life promote social consciousness? Are their opportunities to cooperate instead of compete? Are students learning how to care, give back, consider others?

Criteria 3: Democratic Commitment

Do classroom procedures move toward a democratic ethos? Do they offer freedom and choice, discovery and the experimental? Do the procedures recognize equality giving each child a sense that their individual needs and concerns are addressed? Do students have opportunities to show individuality, not sameness? Are classroom ways of life...
focused on and balanced by the concerns and needs of the community? Is there a
development of social consciousness? Is responsibility to others a significant part of
the conversation?

Joel Westheimer concludes his book *What Kind of Citizen?* with the question,
“What kind of school?” (Westheimer, 99) Here I ask, “What kind of teacher? His
work is a helpful guide.

The Prophetic Teacher is the kind of teacher who:

- teaches students how to ask questions. They create environments of
  questioning. They model the courage to ask why. They encourage fearlessness,
  wonder, curiosity, awe, amazement. They invite critical questioning as the beginning
  of wisdom.

- offers students the opportunity to see issues from a variety of perspectives.
  They search for diverse understandings and allow students to engage with marginal
  voices. They are sensitive to offering an inclusive narrative of the world.

- connects the classroom to the real world. They help students read their world
  (Freire) and are fearless to show, as Dewey suggested, the political and economic
  machinations that are intertwined with their social world.

- reveals the instability of ‘facts’ – or better, the recognition that facts often
  change as more evidence is gathered, more perspectives are heard, as our intelligence
  grows. They reveal that learning is not static but unlimited.
**Dispositions of the Prophetic Teacher**

I will borrow what West proposes as four constitutive elements of prophetic thought. I derive these elements as a framework for what I am calling the Dispositions of the Prophetic Teacher. I use the term dispositions not only to express that these are particular qualities of mind and character, but more importantly perhaps that these are qualities that take up intellectual and moral positions in contrast to current neoliberal positions in which teachers are placed. Neoliberal ‘teaching’ decontextualizes knowledge, narrows the scope of learning to preconceived bits of information that can be regurgitated on standardized tests, disregards teacher/students relationship, aims toward economic utility and political docility, all the while presuming political ‘neutrality.’ As De Lissovoy, Means, and Saltman claim, “Neoliberal accountability regimes *recompose* the process of teaching into a ritual of skill-oriented training and assessment.” Without resistance, teachers become the instruments of this regime. In other words, unless teachers have conceptual and practical alternatives, they can easily take up positions as ‘tools’ in support of these undemocratic practices. The Dispositions of the Prophetic Teacher recognize foremost that “Teaching is primarily a set of relationships and modes of engagement…it counts as a crucial political moment, since the relationships it creates can mimic broader relations of domination or begin to realize liberatory alternatives.” The Dispositions

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450 West, *Prophetic Thought in Postmodern Times*.
451 Lissovoy, Means, and Saltman, *Toward a New Common School Movement*, 75. (emphasis added)
452 Ibid., 74.
of the Prophetic Teacher are proposed as alternative ‘positions’ that can be taken up in an effort to “begin to realize”, or operationalize, “liberatory alternatives.”

1. The Prophetic Disposition of Discernment.

In contrast to the kinds of decontextualized knowledge bits and the presumption of neutrality in neoliberal schooling, the prophetic teacher will reflect a deep exposure in a broad sense of a historical and cultural consciousness necessary for the construction of knowledge. At its base, West calls for a “broad and deep analytical grasp of the present in light of the past.” This disposition, as West’s claim suggests, calls for an understanding that questions constructions of history that propose “cultural monopoly on virtue or insight.” And because the prophetic teacher endeavors to view the social present with ‘eyes wide open’ to an ambiguous and hybrid past, she is inclined to destabilize dominant and oppressive forms of cultural practices toward practices that are inclusive and liberatory. In Democracy Matters, West claims that the “aim of prophetic utterance is to shatter deliberate ignorance and willful blindness to the suffering of others and to expose the clever forms of evasion and escape we devise in order to hide and conceal injustice. The prophetic goal is to stir up in us the courage to care and empower us to change our lives and our historical circumstances.”

Discernment is not an intellectual position that offers stability from which one can

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453 West, Prophetic Thought in Postmodern Times, 3.
454 West, Democracy Matters, 114–15.
propose *a priori* solutions to social problems. Prophetic discernment, in its attempts to see history with ‘clarity’ requires a continual struggle to lift the voices and stories of those who have been silenced in order to gain wisdom for present and future practice.

Dewey perceived the notion of philosophy, the love of wisdom in its connection to action. In a representative sentiment Dewey writes, “…philosophy is love of wisdom; wisdom being not knowledge but knowledge-plus; knowledge turned to account in the instruction and guidance it may convey in piloting life.”

Likewise Dewey called for teachers to engage in social consciousness for action for themselves and as a part of their vocational calling. Dewey called for schools and teachers to take up the questions of “international and interracial” relationships as a way to work against “the flames of hatred and suspicion”. He proposed an intellectually honest view of history that would promote “feelings of respect and friendliness for the other nations and peoples of the world.”

This kind of social consciousness building toward social unification was indeed what he saw as the ‘religious’ work of schools.

Like Dewey, Freire recognized the need “as educators, to think again and again about the political atmosphere, the social atmosphere, cultural atmosphere in which we work as educators.”

Dewey specifically took issue with requirement that teachers become conscious of the social divisions caused by the influence of “industrial and

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457 Horton and Freire, *We Make the Road by Walking*, 76.
economic forces.” He perceived that the “problems of capital and labor, are looming larger in our life than they have in the past.”458 He writes in a work called *Duties and Responsibilities of the Teaching Profession* about the necessity of questioning the current social order or whether teachers should simply indoctrinate students into what already exists. “Can pupils really be educated to take an effective part in social life if all controverted questions are excluded?”459 Prophetic Discernment shares the need to develop the kind of social consciousness that leads to active social engagement with real community problems. It recognizes that teachers and students are called as citizens to help solve social problems not simply vote for problem solving leaders. The imperative for schools and teachers to take up their role in shaping the social consciousness was in its concern with the furthering of a truly democratic society.

The social consciousness necessary to shape Prophetic Discernment is not easily constructed while teachers are already teaching in the classroom. Often the curricular pace and structure of school and classroom practice leaves little room for critical reflection or social consciousness building. New teachers often step into the rushing current of existing practice, lose their balance and are taken downstream toward the ‘inevitable’ falls of testing. In-service professional development, especially in what has come to be known as ‘failing’ schools, is primarily focused on strategies that target the improvement of test scores. The most promising way to build the social

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consciousness needed for Prophetic Discernment is during pre-service teacher preparation. As undergraduate university teacher education departments shrink their coursework in philosophy, history, critical cultural studies, and policy to meet the requirements of the more ‘practical’ environment of neoliberal schooling, the prospects for this kind of Discernment become narrowed. In The Teacher and His World, Dewey wrote of the priorities of teachers.

The most specific thing that educators can first do is something general. The first need is to become aware of the kind of world in which we live; to survey its forces; to see the opposition in forces that are contending for mastery; to make up one's mind which of these forces come from a past that the world in its potential powers has outlived and which are indicative of a better and happier future.460

What is necessary to build this kind of awareness are undergraduate teacher preparation programs that are specifically designed to help teachers ‘read their world’. Critical pedagogical approaches offer hope for Dewey’s concern that teachers understand the social and political environment, that they themselves come to a social consciousness and are positioned to help their students engage with social problems. An ‘eyes wide open’ approach to the world suggests a program for preparing teachers with a strong education policy orientation, history of policy, philosophical movements in education, courses that critically address how politics and economics drive education today, and the politics of curriculum. These ‘critical’ courses should “involve helping adults become aware of oppressive structures and practices,

developing tactical awareness of how they might change these, and building the confidence and ability to work for collective change.”

2. The Prophetic Disposition of Connection.

The Prophetic Disposition of Connection is essentially the grand recognition, so obvious, yet so often ignored, that teaching is a very human endeavor. West says simply that “the moment of human connection means never losing sight of the humanity of others.” Against current neoliberal visions of teaching practice that would conceive of teachers as managers, trainers or inputters of information, Connection recognizes the essential human and therefore moral aspects of the teaching practice. Richard Pring reminds us that “Teaching… is more than a set of specific actions in which a particular person is helped to learn this or that. It is an activity in which the teacher is sharing in a moral enterprise, namely, the initiation of (usually) young people into a worthwhile way of seeing the world, of experiencing it, of relating to others in a more human and understanding way.” The irony of educational policies, from NCLB to ESSA, shaped by neoliberal values is that these policies turn our vision away from humanization toward quantification, the thingifying thingification of children, students morphed into the shape of numerical symbols.

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462 West, Prophetic Thought in Postmodern Times, 5.
463 Pring, “Education as a Moral Practice,” 106.
Ayers suggests that when we are dealing with such a human activity as teaching, our “attempts to create definitive categories” only serves to “lower our sights, misdirect our vision, and mislead our intentions.”\footnote{Ayers, To Teach, 42.} In an education system that aims for performance outcomes measured almost exclusively by standardized testing results, teachers are easily mislead to view students not as individual humans of equal intrinsic value but as quantified group categories on performance assessments.

Connection for the Prophetic Teacher is the preoccupation with the individual in community. Dewey urged schools and teachers to examine their own social conditions, the social conditions of the surrounding culture and the social conditions within the school itself for “opportunities and calls to cooperative service in the making more secure the aims of human liberty and human justice.”\footnote{Dewey and Cohen, The Middle Works of John Dewey, Volume 15, 1899 - 1924, 156–57.} He recognized the school as community and made it the purpose of schools to help students recognize that they are bound together as members and have responsibilities to share in the strengthening of community life.\footnote{Ibid., 158.} The rhetoric of neoliberal schooling as a reflection of competitive global individualism denies responsibility to and for human community. In The School as Social Centre, Dewey models the work of Jane Addams’ Hull House settlement communities and envisions the school as not just a place where information is merely exchanged and discussed but a place “where ideas are incarnated in human form and clothed with the winning grace of personal life. Classes

\footnote{Ayers, To Teach, 42.}
\footnote{Dewey and Cohen, The Middle Works of John Dewey, Volume 15, 1899 - 1924, 156–57.}
\footnote{Ibid., 158.}
for study...are regarded as modes of bringing people together, of doing away with barriers of caste, or class, or race, or type of experience that keep people from real communion with each other."^{467}

In a prescient evaluation of his own time, Dewey wrote of the human connection between the classroom teacher and the student as the essential component of learning. This human connection essential to learning remains the elusive element in the rhetoric of so much of the current educational reform strategy. Dewey wrote in *The Classroom Teacher*:

> Our whole system of examination, inspection, grading, classification, tends almost automatically to introduce a factitious factor that gets between the educator and the human individual that is being developed... It is true that actual education, whatever there is in the way of actual teaching and learning, is done in the classroom, through vital contact, intellectual and moral, between teacher and student."^{468}

The development of human beings is the preoccupation of the Prophetic Teacher. What does it mean to be human? What social conditions contribute to human flourishing? What are we doing in schools that share in the development of humans? These are the moral and ethical questions for the Prophetic Teacher and it is work that is, to the frustration of educational psychometricians of teacher effectiveness, largely unmeasurable. Philosopher Wendell Berry, in his book of essays, *What Are People For?* asks,

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How would you...make a precise estimate of the influence of one teacher? Obviously, you cannot. As thousands of faculty committees have found out, “teacher evaluation” is a hopeless business. There is, thank God, no teacher-meter, and there is never going to be one. A teacher’s major contribution may pop out anonymously in the life of some ex-student’s grandchild. A teacher, finally, has nothing to go on but faith, a student nothing to offer in return but testimony.\textsuperscript{469}

Attending to the space between the teacher and the student is acting prophetically. Teachers work, as Dewey envisioned, in the space between what is and what could be of human development. Our humanity is in our way, not as an obstacle but as a function of what teachers do. Teachers do the very human work of sharing in the making of human beings. Ayers reminds us that “when we as teachers recognize that we are partners with our students in life’s long and complex journey, when we begin to treat them with the dignity and respect they deserve for simply being, then we are on the road to becoming worthy teachers.”\textsuperscript{470} In his \textit{Pedagogic Creed}, Dewey calls teachers to “enter into the child’s life.” Connection for the Prophetic teacher is moving into this very human ‘position’.

3. The Disposition of Tracking Hypocrisy.

The popular understanding of hypocrisy as the saying of one thing and doing another is, of course, only a small part of its fuller sense. West describes it as

\textsuperscript{469} Berry, \textit{What Are People For?}, 54.
\textsuperscript{470} Ayers, \textit{To Teach}, 151.
“accenting boldly, and defiantly, the gap between principles and practice, between promise and performance, between rhetoric and reality.”471 On a personal level it is, as he suggests, a “form of intellectual humility.”472 Teachers in the current climate of accountability are more than aware of criticism. It is true however that teachers are in need of tracking their own hypocrisy when it comes to teaching practices that go against their best values and understanding. As I expressed earlier, resistance to the current neoliberal values of schooling is difficult and teachers can easily lose their moral footing and be swept downstream. Ayers suggests that if teachers are never self-critical “they never have to test their deepest beliefs and values, and over time those values disappear.”473 Prophetic teachers are disposed to be self-critical because they are aware that there is so much in the world of neoliberal schooling that is dehumanizing for students and for them. They are at risk for becoming instruments of dehumanization and always require self-criticism. “Learning to be critical requires taking some risks,” says Ayers, “and these are neither simple nor easy to take…the guiding principle is to be a resistance fighter for children, not to take risks simply to stay in shape.”474 Tracking self-hypocrisy requires a continual effort to swim upstream, continually questioning one’s own practice. The kind of critical reflection Brown proposes for educational administrative leadership is essentially the kind of reflection needed for Prophetic teachers:

471 West, Prophetic Thought in Postmodern Times, 5.
472 Ibid., 6.
473 Ayers, To Teach, 143.
474 Ibid., 144.
Critical inquiry involves the conscious consideration of the moral and ethical implications and consequences of schooling practices on students. Self-reflection adds the dimension of deep examination of personal assumptions, values, and beliefs. Critical reflection merges the two terms and involves the examination of personal and professional belief systems, as well as the deliberate consideration of the ethical implications and effect of practices. 475

The Criteria for Prophetic Discernment, explored above, can begin the process of tracking self-hypocritical tendencies that can go unnoticed in the teachers everyday practice. Critical reflection upon the prophetic criteria can help teachers expose the neoliberal contradictions that lead to the undoing of democratic ways of being within the practices of schooling.

Tracking Hypocrisy is more than just taking up a position of self-criticism and self-reflection. It is also the willingness and courage to reflect critically on our cultural and social hypocrisy. Prophetic Teachers work to hold up our cultural and social practices to the interrogative light of our own democratic values. Prophetic Teachers read history through a kaleidoscopic lens that turns on the perspectives of, what West calls, “world-weary people.” 476 What persistent cultural hypocrisy is revealed in our society’s struggle for racial equality? What hypocrisy is found in the industrial and economic conditions that have led to such social inequality? How does war and patriotism reflect our democratic values? These are some of the questions for

476 West, Prophetic Thought in Postmodern Times, 6.
Prophetic Teachers positioned to track hypocrisy. “Prophetic witness consists of human acts of justice and kindness that attend to the unjust sources of human hurt and misery. Prophetic witness calls attention to the causes of unjustified suffering and unnecessary social misery.” Dewey was clear that these social questions, these areas of social consciousness are the preview of the teacher. Teachers should “remember that they above all others are the consecrated servants of the democratic ideas.” Tracking social and cultural hypocrisy is taking up this servant role.

4. The Disposition of Hope

The position of the teacher in the space of becoming is the position that engages and touches the future. It is the work of the Prophetic Teacher to tinker around in that space of hopes and dreams where students can begin to imagine the future with unlimited possibilities for renewal. West claims that “To talk about human hope is to engage in an audacious attempt to galvanize and energize, to inspire and to invigorate world-weary people.” World-weary would certainly go far in describing the effects of neoliberal schooling on teachers and students. Hopes for a renewed vision of education are often dashed by false prophets of educational reform. Prophetic hope is based on an alternative consciousness that imagines human freedom, that

477 West, Democracy Matters, 17. (emphasis added)
480 West, Prophetic Thought in Postmodern Times, 6.
imagines justice and evokes action toward that imagined future. It is the space where the teacher and the student work together as co-creators of the future.

For Dewey this hope is based on the social work to operationalize democratic ways of living. Stephen Fishman points out that “the object of Dewey’s ultimate hope is democratic living, that is full engrossment in present experience that leads to individual and social growth.” The Prophetic Teacher is disposed to hope in the promises of democratic living. The prophetic looks into the future, does not tell or predict, but it imagines. Prophetic teachers imagine with hope. Prophetic teachers recognize that future-making is a struggle even with, what West calls, our own misanthropic tendencies. We struggle against our own capacity to solve problems, even the trust that we have within our own communities the willingness and strength to realize democratic living.

As the Prophetic Teacher dares to imagine a democratic future, they are deep in the business of hope. Hope for what could be, hope for realities that are not quite here in the present. And this prophetic hope is an invitation to students, and the community to join together as co-creators of the future. William Ayers points to this prophetic hope in the message of the teacher:

The fundamental message of the teacher is this: You must change your life. Whoever you are, wherever you’ve been, whatever you’ve done, the teacher invites you to a second chance, another round, perhaps a different conclusion. The teacher posits possibility, openness, and

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481 Fishman and McCarthy, John Dewey and the Philosophy and Practice of Hope, 32.
482 West, Prophetic Thought in Postmodern Times, 6.
alternative; the teacher points to what could be, but is not yet. The teacher beckons you to change your path.\textsuperscript{483}

Though the Prophetic teacher sees death, death in the dominant consciousness of neoliberal schooling, despair in the forward march into the maw, the Prophetic Teacher sees ultimate hope in a future where communities make democracy their most cherished ideal.

When asked about the prospects of nationalizing his community literacy program, Miles Horton rejected the idea that you could take something so locally imbedded and reproduce it on a grander scale. “…it leaves us”, he said, “working with the remnants, leaves us working with \textit{the little pockets of hope and adventurism} wherever we find it.”\textsuperscript{484} Prophetic Teachers have little to do with national pronouncements about the state of American education, though those who do could certainly learn from them. Prophetic Teachers find their most power as they work the “remnants”, the space of becoming that is opened when a student gets in their way. This is where Prophetic Teachers find “the little pockets of hope and adventurism”, this this the profoundly ‘religious’ work of the Prophetic teacher.

\textsuperscript{483} Ayers, \textit{To Teach}, 161.
\textsuperscript{484} Horton and Freire, \textit{We Make the Road by Walking}, 94.
Conclusion

This past summer I sat with a group of teachers in a larger auditorium filled with parents and family members to witness the high school graduation ceremony for our school district. I was there, like many of the teachers with me, because I had been personally invited by several of my former students. We have a tradition in our district that encourages the graduates to request the presence of an influential teacher who then gets to greet and congratulate them as they receive their diploma. I was honored to be there for four of my former students who had requested my presence. What was unique about this particular group of students was that these were students I had taught for three years. I had been teaching fifth grade students but due to an increase in the student population for the upcoming year there would be an extra fourth grade class coming through. I volunteered to ‘drop down’ and teach fourth grade knowing that I would have the opportunity to loop with these students back to fifth grade the following year.

With administrative and parental support, I was able to carry over into the fifth grade my entire class of fourth graders for good and ill. At the end of that year a position at our district’s middle school opened and I moved to the 7th grade to teach science. This provided the very unique opportunity to have some of the same students
in 7th grade that I had taught in fourth and fifth. I sat there looking at those faces, the four who had invited me and the many others I’d remembered from those days in the fourth grade. I wondered what I had done to ‘disturb’ them. What impact had I really made on their lives? Did I make a difference? Was I ‘prophetic’? In some way did I offer “refuge in distress,” or did my “voice and vision” sustain their faith in humanity? Most likely, much like my own experience, I was there for reasons they may not have quite been able to articulate.

The stage was full of important district people from the superintendent, to the director of curriculum, to the director of buildings and grounds, and school board members all lined up to shake a hand and congratulate each graduate. And then there were the teachers, waiting at the bottom of the stairs just off the front of the stage, just outside the spotlights. As each of my students got close to the end of the long line of greeters, I made my way from my seat to the end of the stairway. Though older and much more mature, I could still see the eyes of a fourth grader. Each time, I waited at the end of the stairs, shook their hand and pulled them in for a hug. I told them quickly, there wasn’t much time, “I’m very proud of you.” They each smiled and returned to their assigned seat. I returned to mine. As I sat there watching the students, some familiar, it struck me as so typical. The crowded spotlights on the stage highlighted the students shaking the hands of ten people they barely knew. Ten powerful people who had very little to do with the students who walked in front of them. These were people far removed from the space of becoming, far removed from
the space of the prophetic teacher. Their teachers, so intimately connected to their personal and educational journeys were somewhere offstage, out of the spotlight.

The purpose of this study was to explore the deleterious and often dehumanizing effects of neoliberal conceptions of schooling on broader democratic forms of education as Dewey conceived them. Education is essentially a human endeavor of origin and purpose, it proceeds from humanity and its goal is humanity. Education nurtures individuality and invites the flowering of community. Education is about life together. With a renewed vision of education, I positioned teachers as the prophets of democracy who work to subvert the culture of neoliberal schooling. Dewey’s notion of the religious and his enigmatic claim that the teacher is a “prophet of the true God” offers us a way to think differently about the aims and purposes of education situated now within the riverbeds of twenty-first century neoliberalism. If neoliberalism has hollowed out the landscape of education such that its streams run thick with silt, prophetic teachers call for dredging. While dredging, prophetic teachers work to restore the eroded hillsides; they plant new trees. And where there are deserts, prophetic teachers tap into alternative streams that over time can bring hope and new life to the cut and dried, do or die world of neoliberal schooling.

Concerning Dewey’s dismissal of supernatural religion, I recognize that historic attempts to prove the existence of a preexistent, supernatural being have and continue to be futile and unhelpful. The question of whether something or someone exists beyond our ability to perceive it is not a question with which pragmatism is concerned. It is not the case, however, that Dewey went around dismissing people’s
faith or religious experience. He claims that particularly for those who are unable to accept the intellectual and moral implications of some religious doctrines and traditions, religious faith and experience is still possible. All we have is experience within the natural world. I think it is possible to maintain a rich sense of awe and reverence for one’s place in the world, an active devotion to social justice, and a keen awareness of the love of family and community without ascribing allegiance to a supernatural being. These things exist and are experienced goods in everyday life whether or not they are given theological import. Unlike Dewey, who seemed to think that advancing science would eventually dissolve the need for religion, I do not look for a time when the ‘supernatural’ will cease to exist in American life. Reference to the supernatural continues to capture much personal and social political power to justify actions and sustain communal cohesion. The instability of life, as Dewey suggested drives one toward the quest for certainty and comfort that ultimate being provides. To the extent that American religious life is based on a rich experiential tradition and lacks depth of interaction with philosophy and science it will continue to maintain a strong connection to its supernatural roots. To the extent that we, as a human species, may be evolutionarily ‘guided’ toward self-transcendence and social connection, what E.O. Wilson calls eusocial evolution, religions will continue to be a part of human culture. “Religious believers today are not, as a rule, much interested in theology and not at all in the evolutionary steps that led to present-day world religions. They are concerned instead with religious faith and the benefits it provides.”485 Dewey

never meant to discount religious faith but only wanted to show that one did not have
to exclude the richness of religious experience from life if one was unable to
intellectually adhere to the supernatural doctrinal claims of a religion.

I am convinced, like Dewey, that the methods of science; the processes of open
inquiry, evidence gathering, experimentation, and the development of “warranted
assertions” is the best way we have to solve problems. This does not discount religious
experience or mystical experience as a unifying reality in life. This does is not
promote a cold empirical existence nor does it exclude religious experience from the
evidence we gather in our attempts to solve our most stubborn social problems. Dewey
attempts to carve out a middle ground between supernaturalism and strict atheism
where a person could have faith and experience the unifying self-transcendence of the
religious without making intellectually dishonest claims about the natural world. The
old aphorism that “God has no hands nor feet” is a recognition that even the most
devout religionist must rise from prayer and do the work of faith. It is the recognition
that human effort is the substance of faith enacted. The scientist and the religionist can
work side by side in their efforts to relieve suffering and create a better world.

When it comes to the place of religion in schools I worry that even our best
efforts to control for bias will lead to misrepresentation, misunderstandings, and the
continued promotion of dominate cultural ideologies. The questions of who teaches,
what ‘facts’ are presented, and whose perspective is most representative are complex
and politically charged. Schools should be open places where discussions of faith,
human experience, and ultimate meaning are not excluded yet places guarded against
the tribal and divisive nature of religions. Daniel Dennett has offered what seems to me a disingenuous call for an in-depth study of all religions in schools. Behind his invitation is his own sense that it is time to place religion under the scientific microscope and recognize its deficiencies in an evidence-based world. He writes, “If you have to hoodwink—or blindfold—your children to ensure that they confirm their faith when they are adults, your faith ought to go extinct.”486 This seems to be a severe and insensitive proposal. Dewey made an attempt to unravel religion and religious experience recognizing that without such a separation the prospects for democracy diminished. On the face of it I suppose Dewey’s claim that supernatural religion should fade away is no less severe than Dennett’s. When faced with the two extremes of supernaturalism and militant atheism, I too seek to find a middle way of “natural piety” for the sake of democratic living. I trust that schools can become more religious, and teachers more prophetic, when they serve the cause of democratic unity than if they were to teach particular religions.

Dewey claimed that the teacher was a prophet, positioned in such a space that profoundly shaped the social world toward democratic living. After all, “the work of the teacher remains thus, forever, a frontier task. Always the teacher must deal with life at its point of becoming. What has been and what is are the raw materials out of which students and teachers must create what is to be.”487 I remain uncertain as to my own legacy as a teacher, whether I turn out to be prophetic is for my students to say. I

486 Dennett, Breaking the Spell, 328. (emphasis original)
will remain content however, to work in this space of becoming, at the end of the 
stairs, offstage, out of the spotlight. “A teacher, finally, has nothing to go on but faith, 
a student nothing to offer in return but testimony.”\textsuperscript{488}
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Appendix A: Neoliberal Tenets

Steven Ward lists 10 characteristics of Neoliberalism:

1. “A theory of agency that sees self-interest and avarice as primary human psychology (generating ‘contract-like’ relationships)
2. Superior rationality, efficiency and optimizing effects of markets on economy and social institutions and activities
3. Deregulation of markets and redirection of state activities away from social welfare and regulatory functions toward capital accumulation, toward profit auditing and making policies.
4. Economization of social policy- economics as final arbitrator
5. Intensification of economy and scope of economic exchange
6. Focus on enhancement of shareholder value.
7. Focus on expanding ‘free trade’, globalizing commodities, off shoring
8. Reforming the public realm and public institutions by market and privatization measures
9. Opposition to labor unions or professional associations viewed as upsetting the equilibrium of the market sense- inflate wages, slow down production, etc
10. Stakeholder society- self-interested people linked to the economy and society as a whole by private consumption, self-interest.”

Corpwatch: The main points of neo-liberalism include:

1. **The Rule of the Market.** Liberating "free" enterprise or private enterprise from any bonds imposed by the government (the state) no matter how much social damage this causes. Greater openness to international trade and investment, as in NAFTA. Reduce wages by de-unionizing workers and eliminating workers' rights that had been won over many years of struggle. No more price controls. All in all, total freedom of movement for capital, goods and services. To convince us this is good for us, they say "an unregulated

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market is the best way to increase economic growth, which will ultimately benefit everyone." It's like Reagan's "supply-side" and "trickle-down" economics -- but somehow the wealth didn't trickle down very much.

2. **Cutting Public Expenditure for Social Services** like education and health care. Reducing the safety-net for the poor, and even maintenance of roads, bridges, water supply -- again in the name of reducing government's role. Of course, they don't oppose government subsidies and tax benefits for business.

3. **Deregulation.** Reduce government regulation of everything that could diminish profits, including protecting the environment and safety on the job.

4. **Privatization.** Sell state-owned enterprises, goods and services to private investors. This includes banks, key industries, railroads, toll highways, electricity, schools, hospitals and even fresh water. Although usually done in the name of greater efficiency, which is often needed, privatization has mainly had the effect of concentrating wealth even more in a few hands and making the public pay even more for its needs.

5. **Eliminating the Concept of “The Public Good” or “Community”** and replacing it with "individual responsibility." Pressuring the poorest people in a society to find solutions to their lack of health care, education and social security all by themselves -- then blaming them, if they fail, as "lazy." 490

The Utopian: “The Thirteen Commandments of Neoliberalism.”

1. Thou Shalt Revive Authority in a New Guise.
2. Thou Shalt Erase Distinctions.
3. Thou Shalt Worship “Spontaneous Order.”
4. Thou Shalt Retask the State to Thy Needs.
5. Thou Shalt Redefine Democracy.
6. Thou Shalt Become the Manager of Thyself.
7. Thou Shalt Redefine Freedom and Knowledge.
8. Thou Shalt Keep Thy Cronyism Cosmopolitan.
9. Thou Shalt Know that Inequality is Natural.
11. Thou Shalt Trust the Bankers.
12. Thou Shalt Redefine Crime.
13. Thou Shalt Accommodate the Religious Right. 491

490 “CorpWatch : What Is Neoliberalism?”
491 “The Thirteen Commandments of Neoliberalism.”
## Appendix B: Dewey’s Terminology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Dewey’s Usage</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Religions</td>
<td>Intellectualized and institutionalized doctrines, dogmas, beliefs and practices conditioned by social culture and historical circumstances. Religions have historical and cultural origins. A set of fixed doctrinal positions around the necessity of a supernatural being and an immortality beyond the natural world.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Religious</td>
<td>A quality of experience that functions to bring about a better, deeper and enduring adjustment in life. A quality of experience that provides a sense of oneness, unity with self and nature. A sense of connection to the world. A recognition of one’s dependence on and support of the natural world. A pervasive quality of experience that exists within and outside of particular religions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>God</td>
<td>The unity of all ideal ends arousing us to desire and action. Ideals have their roots in natural conditions and need no identification with a being outside of nature to have operative power over human conduct. The operative power to move us from the actual to the ideal is the function that is traditionally given to the concept of ‘God’. God as a preexisting being has no meaning and the word ‘God’ is only a placeholder for the power of an ideal to shape human action.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kingdom of God</td>
<td>The unification of humanity in all its social relations. The social community that progresses toward the actualization of ideal unity. The ‘secular’ realization of the kingdom is operationalized in the expressions of democratic living. The democratic ideal expressed in community is synonymous with the kingdom of God.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural Piety</td>
<td>A sense of awe and reverence for one’s connection to, dependence upon, and support for the natural and social world. A respect for and trust in the natural relations between humanity and the environment.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>