

## BOOK REVIEW

### *John Dewey's Philosophy of Spirit, with the 1897 Lecture on Hegel*

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John R. Shook and James A. Good, *John Dewey's Philosophy of Spirit, with the 1897 Lecture on Hegel*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2010. xii + 197 pages. ISBN 978-0-8232-3139-3. \$25.00 (pbk.)

John Shook and James Good have each made significant contributions to the scholarly discussion of John Dewey's "permanent Hegelian deposit." In this collection, they come together to further develop their respective analyses of Dewey's Hegelianism. The volume combines two essays, one from each of the authors, in addition to the "definitive text" of Dewey's own 1897 lecture on Hegel, given at the University of Chicago, and entitled "Hegel's Philosophy of Spirit." In comparison to Shook's earlier, more comprehensive work on Dewey's relationship to Hegel, *Dewey's Empirical Theory of Knowledge and Reality* (2000), and Good's similarly intensive treatment, *A Search for Unity in Diversity: The "Permanent Hegelian Deposit" in the Philosophy of John Dewey* (2006), the two essays, even in combination with one another, are somewhat fractional and incomplete. The essays succeed, however, in furthering our understanding of the way Dewey's Hegelianism can illuminate his mature philosophy.

In the first essay, "Dewey's Naturalized Philosophy of Spirit and Religion," Shook explores how Dewey maintained a place for "religious" faith in his pragmatism despite his antipathy toward organized religion. Drawing on several of Dewey's texts, and in particular *A Common Faith* (1934), Shook interprets Deweyan faith as a practical tool which sustains individuals in pursuit of their self-chosen ends (34-35). For Dewey, an ideal cannot be achieved without overcoming obstacles in its pursuit. Since persistence does not guarantee success, faith in the possibility of achieving the ideal is necessary for persevering through inevitable setbacks. Alluding to Dewey's distinction between "religion" and "the religious," Shook describes how Dewey saw adherence to organized religion as ineffective for coping in a fundamentally uncertain world. Dewey viewed "any belief in the existence of a divine power to be incompatible with naturalism and quite irrelevant for a genuinely religious life" (19). "Religious" individuals, on the other hand, rather than simply trusting in the

protection of an external divine entity, possess the necessary faith not to abandon pursuit of self-chosen ends when confronted with a devastating loss: "The religious, according to Dewey, do not surrender their ideals and moral convictions in the face of tragedy, and neither do they repose in certainty about guaranteed ideals" (36). This is the pragmatic value of Deweyan faith; and for Shook, it exhibits substantial Hegelian influence. He presents Dewey's notion that there is religious quality to our practical engagements with our surroundings as a translation of Hegel's concept of the divine manifesting itself through purposive human action. He argues that "Dewey understood and presented Hegel as taking this generally pragmatic approach to religion" (17). Shook's analysis thus allows us to conceptualize Dewey's use of religious language in terms consistent with his pragmatism, once we see his religious views as "a prominent illustration of the way that he remained indebted to Hegel throughout his long career" (31).

In the second essay, "Rereading Dewey's 'Permanent Hegelian Deposit,'" Good provides a sustained analysis of Dewey's 1897 lecture on Hegel. His purpose is to further develop the central claim of his 2006 book, namely, that Dewey's break with the British neo-Hegelians during the 1890s was not a break with Hegel himself. Rather, it was a move toward a humanist/historicist reading of Hegel and away from the neo-Hegelians' metaphysical/theological reading. Good explains how it is "assumed that Dewey's pragmatic notion that ideas have real effects in the world was at odds with Hegelian philosophy. But Dewey's lecture 'Hegel's Philosophy of Spirit' demonstrates that he saw this pragmatic account of ideas in Hegel" (66). Good particularly emphasizes the way "Dewey's claim [in the 1897 lecture] that Hegel was a great actualist markedly contrasts with the common characterization of Hegel as the grand metaphysician who reduced the particularities of experience to transient nodes of a dynamic, eternal, and transcendent supreme being" (66). This accurately depicts Dewey and Hegel's shared distaste for mere abstraction from concrete action, and their conviction that any idea, or concept, only attains actuality in being progressively worked out through experience. Thus, in contrast to the static, "transcendent absolute" that neo-Hegelians such as T.H. Green find so attractive, Dewey's Hegel is committed to the continuous engagement with the practical conflicts of ordinary experience, and does not require any entity separate from experience to drive this movement: "Dewey's lecture 'Hegel's Philosophy of Spirit,' in conjunction with Dewey's critique of Green's moral thought, demonstrates that his rejection of neo-Hegelianism during the early 1890s should not be equated with a rejection of Hegel" (71-72). For Dewey, then, the Hegelian *Absolute* refers not to any static, divine achievement, but rather to the continuous, infinite development of human achievements.

So what is Dewey's philosophy of spirit? Neither Shook nor Good clearly answers this question. In particular, I think the authors could have been more precise in their definitions of Hegel's philosophy of spirit, and in their accounts of how this

concept connects with Dewey's pragmatism. Shook asserts that "Dewey's philosophy of spirit is his theory of the social conditions for the growth of individuality" (55). In slightly different terms, Good explains how "the unity of Hegel's absolute spirit is constantly being sundered and re-created by adversity and diversity (Hegel's negation). Hence particular identities are not a mere means to a final state of maturation in which they will be abolished but are the essential engine of its never-ending growth" (61). He then states that Dewey's philosophy of education, which "characterizes education as perpetual growth . . . formulates a philosophy of spirit" (61). I would not say either of these descriptions is off the mark; it is certainly true that Dewey's ideal of self-directed, continuous growth cannot exist apart from necessary social conditions, and it is true that Hegel's Spirit requires particular identities to drive its growth—much like Dewey's description of individuals and communities that continuously develop through the activities of communication, inquiry, and action. However, I think we can draw a more precise link between Spirit and pragmatism, and explain in clearer terms what is required of individuals and collectivities if they are to contribute to Spirit's continuous progression.

In *The Phenomenology of Spirit* ([1807] 1977), Hegel states that "Spirit is the knowledge of oneself in the externalization of oneself; the being that is the movement of retaining its self-identity in its otherness" (459). The being which manifests Spirit thus "sees itself" in what negates it, and moves Spirit forward by negating negation. In the 1897 lecture on Hegel presented in this volume, Dewey emphasizes the link between Spirit and the negation of negation. He points out that for Hegel, "it is of the very nature of . . . spirit, to oppose itself and through this opposition to reach its own realized development" (107). Spirit is then actualized by the movement to negate such negation: "opposition is constantly overcome in the very life of the spirit itself" (107). On Dewey's reading, Hegel's Spirit is not separate from individuals' lived experience, but rather realized through it: "the individual is himself an expression of the absolute spirit . . ." (113). This connection of Spirit with the individual act of negating negation, however, is not highlighted by Shook or Good, despite Dewey's emphasis on this point in his lecture. For Dewey (and Hegel), individuals demonstrate a "spiritual" (rather than merely "natural") existence by stamping themselves onto the world in a reflective, self-chosen way; and this spiritual action requires "[utilizing] the material of nature by forming out of it ends and ideals and then proceeding to realize these ends" (119).

Dewey's philosophy of spirit is thus intimately connected with individuals' practical activity. Individuals formulate their own ends, and give themselves objective existence through action toward those ends, which, in turn, drives the actualization of spirit. Hegel's Spirit is the distinctly human power of overcoming contradiction, or, of synthesizing the opposing elements generated by any human action. So, it is required of *spiritual* individuals to "see themselves in" the negation brought about by new experiences, and to put forward the effort to negate the ne-

gation. That Dewey shares such a philosophy of spirit with Hegel is evident in *The Quest for Certainty* (1929). He describes a "scientific attitude" which is "capable of enjoying the doubtful" (228), and which can "effect the transformation of the obscure and perplexing situations of experience into clear and resolved situations" (124). This negation of negations, this resolution of problematic situations, requires that individuals initially feel unsettled and anxious about a disruption in the situation. It is an experience that Dewey describes in *How We Think* (1910) as "a condition of mental unrest and disturbance" (13). As he explains in *Human Nature and Conduct* (1922), this disturbed state is necessary if individuals are to take the already accomplished work of Spirit, the "long record of past experimentation in conduct," and move Spirit forward by "observ[ing] how old principles actually work under new conditions," and "modify[ing] them so that they will be more effectual instruments in judging new cases" (239). By moving Spirit forward, individuals generate greater certainty for themselves in a world where complete certainty is unattainable—an important insight for both Dewey and Hegel. The connection between Hegel's Spirit and Dewey's pragmatism can thus be found in their shared focus on the most effective ways of overcoming the obstacles intrinsic to lived experience for the purpose of generating a more stable future. Hence, if we are to identify a Hegel-inspired philosophy of "spirit" in Dewey's thought, and also shore up the imprecise aspects of Shook and Good's analyses, it is worthwhile to recognize Spirit as a movement through contradiction which is progressively actualized through individuals' own pragmatic activity.

Overall, this volume represents a constructive extension of the authors' previous work on Dewey's relationship with Hegel. Shook's 2000 book argued that Dewey, instead of breaking from Hegelian idealism, developed a consistent idealism which dealt seriously with lived experience. Good's 2006 work went further by distinguishing Dewey's humanist/historicist interpretation of Hegel from the metaphysical/theological reading by the British neo-Hegelians. The essays in this volume are narrower in scope, but they do show how Dewey's "religious faith" can be illuminated through his relationship to Hegel, and how his 1897 lecture on Hegel further differentiates his own reading of Hegel from that of the neo-Hegelians. I would have liked greater precision in the conceptualization of Dewey's philosophy of spirit, specifically how the movement of spirit is carried forward through individual action. Nevertheless, Shook and Good's volume successfully makes the case that we cannot fully understand Dewey's pragmatism without also first gaining a better understanding of Hegel's philosophy of spirit.

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