



## **Idealism, Pragmatism, and the Birth of Pragmatist Educational Thought in America**

Idealismo, Pragmatismo e o Nascimento do  
pensamento educacional pragmatista na América

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Idéalisme, pragmatisme et la naissance de la  
pensée éducative pragmatiste en Amérique

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### **Abstract**

This article articulates some of the historic as well as the main philosophic contributions to the transitional period in educational thought in America, 1866-1895. This is a period in which the movement away from idealism towards pragmatism as the basis for educational thought began. Contemporaneous with the development of pragmatism was a development in educational thought that stressed naturalism, functionalism, and the organic nature of mind and behaviour. As idealism laid claim to the dominant philosophy in America in the period 1866-1895, so too did it lay claim to being the dominant philosophic presupposition of educational thought. It was the first American philosophy of education: America's first philosophy of education was not pragmatist; it was idealist, though this would change, beginning in the mid-1890's. As pragmatism began to take hold of philosophy at the *fin de siècle*, so too did it begin to take hold of, and later dominate, the philosophic presuppositions of educational thought.

**Keywords:** Pragmatism. Idealism. American philosophy of education in the 1890s.

## Resumo

Este trabalho articula algumas das contribuições históricas e as principais obras filosóficas do período transicional do pensamento educacional na América entre 1866 e 1895. Este é um período no qual o pensamento educacional se move do idealismo ao pragmatismo. Contemporâneo ao desenvolvimento do pragmatismo houve um desenvolvimento no pensamento educacional que acentuava o naturalismo, o funcionalismo e a natureza orgânica da mente e da conduta. O idealismo se situava não apenas como o pressuposto filosófico dominante do pensamento filosófico no período 1866-1895, como também reclamava ser o pressuposto filosófico dominante no pensamento educacional. Foi a primeira filosofia da educação americana e não foi pragmatista, foi idealista ainda que isso mudaria a partir da metade dos anos noventa. Assim como o pragmatismo começou a dominar a filosofia de *fin de siècle*, também o fez com as pressuposições filosóficas do pensamento educacional.

**Palavras chave:** Idealismo. Pragmatismo. Filosofia Americana da Educação nos anos 1890.

## Resumen

Este trabajo articula algunas de las contribuciones históricas y las principales obras filosóficas del período transicional de pensamiento educacional en América entre 1866 and 1895. Este es un período en el que el pensamiento educacional se mueve del idealismo al pragmatismo. Contemporáneo con el desarrollo del pragmatismo hubo un desarrollo en el pensamiento educacional que acentuaba el naturalismo, el funcionalismo, y la naturaleza orgánica de la mente y la conducta. El idealismo se situaba no sólo como la presuposición filosófica dominante del pensamiento filosófico en el periodo 1866-1895, sino que reclamaba ser la presuposición filosófica dominante en el pensamiento educacional. Fue la primera filosofía de la educación Americana y no fue pragmatista, fue idealista aunque esto cambiaría a partir de la mitad de los años noventa. Así como el pragmatismo comenzó a dominar la filosofía de fin de siècle, también lo hizo con las presuposiciones filosóficas del pensamiento educacional.

**Palabras claves:** Idealismo. Pragmatismo. Filosofía Americana de la Educación en los Años de 1890.

## Résumé

Cet article trace certaines des contributions historiques ainsi que les principales contributions philosophiques à la période de transition dans la pensée éducative en Amérique de 1866 à 1895. Cette période verra une transition de l'idéalisme vers le pragmatisme en tant que base de la pensée éducative. Parallèlement au développement du pragmatisme fut celui de la pensée éducative mettant l'accent sur le naturalisme, le fonctionnalisme et la nature organique de l'esprit et du comportement. Tout comme l'idéalisme revendiqua la philosophie dominante en Amérique durant la période 1866–1895, il revendiqua également être le présumé philosophique dominant de la pensée éducative. Ce fut la première philosophie de l'éducation américaine, philosophie non pas pragmatique mais plutôt idéaliste, bien que cela allait changer vers le milieu des années 1890. À mesure que le pragmatisme commença à s'emparer de la philosophie à la fin du siècle, il commença également à s'emparer, et plus tard dominerait, les présumés philosophiques de la pensée éducative.

**Mots clés:** Idéalisme. Pragmatisme. Amérique. C.S. Peirce. William James. John Dewey. W.T. Harris. Fin-de-siècle. Pensée éducative. Science de l'éducation. Philosophie de l'éducation. Historiographie.

## Introduction

Much has been written on the *history* of the intellectual development of educational thought at *fin de siècle* America, and specifically, the role of pragmatism therein. Less has been written on the *philosophic* development of pragmatism in educational thought. What I mean by philosophic development in contrast to the history of intellectual development is the provision of a “history of philosophy” accounting of pragmatism’s role in moving educational thought at *fin de siècle* America away from idealism and towards a functionalist, organic, and holist accounting of teaching and learning, the curriculum, and schools. This history of philosophy is speculative in P.L. Gardiner’s sense, insofar as it considers the development of pragmatism in regards education synoptically, or in terms of its overall effect on the intellectual development of the age.<sup>1</sup> While the development of the specifically pragmatic premises and conclusions that go into the transformation of educational thought is dialectical, the pronouncement on the significance of the development is humane and rational.<sup>2</sup>

The variety of educational thought that supplants idealism and of which I am speaking is, anachronistically, Deweyan. For it is a science of education in light of Dewey’s emergent philosophy that took shape against idealism. It is not yet a philosophy of education though, for it does not contain an articulated metaphysics, logic, ethics, or socio-political philosophy. As I shall discuss, this would become a philosophy of education, but not in the 1890’s. The backdrop to pragmatism was in turn, various scientific, philosophical, literary, and religious movements dominant in America in the early and middle parts of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. These include transcendentalism, German and British idealism, materialism and naturalism. It was foremost against this backdrop that philosophical presuppositions soon to be identified as pragmatist, arose.<sup>3</sup> The earliest presuppositions of those that formed the nucleus of what would become pragmatism at the Metaphysical Club in Boston beginning in the late 1860’s—notably Chauncey Wright, C.S. Peirce, and William James—were informed of these movements and in turn influenced the specifically Deweyan contribution that would follow.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, Dewey was influenced in his intellectual development from idealism to pragmatism by key figures working in the environment of the University of Michigan and the University of Chicago, including G.H. Mead, James Rolland Angell, Addison Webster Moore, as well as the pioneer of the settlement movement in Chicago, Jane Addams.<sup>5</sup>

This article articulates some of the historic as well as the main philosophic contributions to the transitional period in educational thought in America, 1866-1895. This is a period in which the movement away from idealism towards pragmatism as the basis for educational thought began. Contemporaneous with the development of pragmatism was a development in educational thought that stressed naturalism, functionalism, and the organic nature of mind and behaviour. As idealism laid claim to the dominant philosophy in America in the period 1866-1895, so too did it lay claim to being the dominant philosophic presupposition of educational

<sup>1</sup> Patrick Gardiner, *Theories of History* (New York: Free Press, 1959).

<sup>2</sup> Gardner, *Theories*.

<sup>3</sup> James Scott Johnston, “The Philosophical Milieu in 19th Century American Education: From Idealism and Pragmatism,” in *A History of Western Philosophy of Education in the Modern Era*, ed. Andrea English (London: Bloomsbury, 2021), 127-150.

<sup>4</sup> George Dykhuizen, *The Life and Mind of John Dewey* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1973); Robert Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991); Alan Ryan, *John Dewey and the High Tide of American Liberalism* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1995); Thomas Dalton, *Becoming John Dewey: Dilemmas of a Philosopher and Naturalist* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002).

<sup>5</sup> Westbrook, *John Dewey*, 1991; Andrew Feffer, *The Chicago Pragmatists and American Progressivism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992); Ryan, *John Dewey and the High Tide*; Stephen Fesmire, *Dewey* (New York: Routledge, 2015); Stephen Fesmire, “Democracy and the Industrial Imagination in American Education,” *Education and Culture* 32, no. 1 (2016): 53-62; Mary-Jo Deegan, *Jane Addams and the Men of the Chicago School, 1892-1918* (New York: Routledge, 2017).

thought. It was the first American philosophy of education: America's first philosophy of education was not pragmatist; it was idealist, though this would change, beginning in the mid-1890's. This chapter explores the transition of the philosophy behind that change. As pragmatism began to take hold of philosophy at the *fin de siècle*, so too did it begin to take hold of, and later dominate, the philosophic presuppositions of educational thought. Ultimately, it would emerge as the first bona fide philosophy of education in 20<sup>th</sup> century America. The role and scope of idealism in American educational thought is, from the standpoint of the history of philosophy, underdeveloped in comparison to its pragmatist and progressivist rival. I will examine the nascent yet emerging pragmatism in light of the dominant philosophy of education—idealism—during this time period. I will discuss American educational thought in its transition from idealism to pragmatism through an examination of main motifs common to both. I will discuss historical events leading to this transition, though much of my article is reserved for specifically philosophical interventions. What were the claims and arguments, the premises and conclusions, attempted by the nascent pragmatists, most of all Dewey, who wrested educational thought from idealism?

I divide this article into two sections. In the first section I examine the dominant philosophical standpoint in America in the year 1895: Hegel-inspired idealism. A brief survey of the role played by the St. Louis Hegelians—especially William Torrey Harris—with attention to the specifically philosophical claims made on their behalf is then provided. Consonant with Harris's own work, I extend this standpoint to educational thought. In the second section I examine Dewey's emergent thinking on education and bring us to Dewey's famous presentation of a draft of *Interest in Relation to Training of the Will*<sup>6</sup> at the Herbart Society meeting in 1895 and the publication of this text as a supplement to the 1896 Herbart Society *Yearbook*. This sets the stage for the debate over the idealist and Deweyan pragmatic educational thought that follows in the wake of the 1895 presentation.

### **Hegelian Idealism in America, 1866-1895**

Hegelian idealism served in the role of justification for the first science of education and indeed, philosophy of education, in the United States. While Horace Mann's journey across Europe in 1843 and his subsequent 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Report (Mann 1957) led to an interest in the methods of Heinrich Pestalozzi and J. H. Herbart, as late as the 1850's, no science of education that could be called systematic had yet to take form. Harris himself discovered G.W.F. Hegel only in the late 1850's. Hegelian idealism had its outsized impact on America in the years between 1866-1895. This was due in the main to the formation of the first philosophy journal in the United States, *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*. The journal, pioneered by the three leading "St. Louis Hegelians," Henry Brokmeyer, Denton Snider, and (especially) Harris, self-consciously promoted idealist and specifically, Hegelian thought.<sup>7</sup> Harris himself edited the journal from 1866-1892. He used this and other venues to propagate his version of Hegelianism; a version that stressed not only the religious understanding of Hegel's Absolute, but the politically progressive elements over and against conflict.<sup>8</sup> Hegel's "Kingdom of God on Earth"

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<sup>6</sup> William Torrey Harris, "Professor John Dewey's Doctrine of Interest as Related to Will," *Educational Review* xi, (May 1896): 486-93.

<sup>7</sup> Henry Pochmann, *German Culture in America: Philosophical and Literary Influences* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1957); Elizabeth Flower and Murray G. Murphey, *A History of Philosophy in America*, vol. 1. (New York: G.P. Putnam's, 1977); Kurt Leidecker, *Yankee Teacher: The Life of William Torrey Harris* (New York: The Philosophical Library, 1971); Bruce Kuklick, *A History of Philosophy in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

<sup>8</sup> William Torrey Harris and Duane Doty, *A Statement of the Theory of Education in the United States of America, as Approved by Many Leading Educators* (Washington, DC: United States Office of Education, 1874).

was, for Harris, the United States of America.<sup>9</sup> This formed the objective side of what Harris took to be Hegel's program of Absolute idealism for a science of education. And Hegel's account of the development of the child's sense of self was, for Harris, the subjective side (subjective spirit) to an objective science of education *par excellence*, as we shall see. Harris, of New England stock, arrived in St. Louis after completing three years at Yale. He originally intended to farm or run a business, but gradually settled into teaching, beginning as a grammar school teacher, rapidly progressing to principal, assistant superintendent, and finally, superintendent of the St. Louis schools.<sup>10</sup> It was Harris who first assembled the St. Louis Philosophical Society, and it was Harris who led the impetus for the *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*.<sup>11</sup> Harris became secretary of the St. Louis Philosophical Society in 1858 and founded *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* in 1866. Harris also shepherded the publication of what would become the first book-length manuscript on the philosophy of education: Johann Karl Friedrich Rosenkranz's *The Philosophy of Education*.<sup>12</sup> Though Rosenkranz's volume was translated from a series of articles originally written in German, it was published in English together with Harris's addenda. Harris would become the first professor of philosophy of education in America sometime in the late 1870's, with an appointment at Washington University in St. Louis (Fisch 1986).<sup>13</sup> In 1882, he de-camped to Concord, Massachusetts, and in 1889 became the very first U.S. Commissioner of Education.

Harris drew his philosophical legacy from numerous sources. In the 1850's, he was enamoured with Ralph Waldo Emerson and Bronson Alcott, and eagerly took up Plato and Immanuel Kant.<sup>14</sup> Hegel came later, in the late 1850's.<sup>15</sup> Emerson and Alcott were predominantly intuitionists, and though Alcott began to take Hegel seriously after 1870,<sup>16</sup> Emerson never did.<sup>17</sup> The result in Harris was an *intuitionist* Hegel—a Hegel that stressed the intuitive, abstract, and essentialist side or phase of consciousness and self-consciousness, of experience, of philosophy, of history over against the external, the particular, the finite. Harris's Hegel was thoroughly protestant and thoroughly divine. Harris claimed Hegel's divine is "perfect form",<sup>18</sup> stressing the formal over the material aspect. For Harris, Hegel's Absolute eternally knows itself as "perfect self-consciousness," and elevates itself, as object, into perfect "self-activity" and "independence".<sup>19</sup> Though Hegel subordinated religion to philosophy in the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Outline* and elsewhere (Hegel 1990), Harris always kept the divine front and centre in his estimation of philosophy's contribution to the West and to the American nation.<sup>20</sup> Harris' intuitionist reading of Hegel would serve as the first genuinely American contribution to the science, indeed, to a theory of education, largely through practical circumstances: as a result of his superintendency of the St. Louis Schools and the resulting reports, his editorship of *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, his editorship and

<sup>9</sup> Harris and Doty, *A Statement*.

<sup>10</sup> Leidecker, *Yankee Teacher*.

<sup>11</sup> Leidecker, *Yankee Teacher*.

<sup>12</sup> Johann Karl Friedrich Rosenkranz, *The Philosophy of Education*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Appleton, 1925).

<sup>13</sup> Max Fisch, "Philosophical Clubs in Cambridge and Boston." in Peirce, *Semiotics, and Pragmatism*, eds. Kenneth Laine Ketner and Christian. J.W. Kloesel (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 137-170.

<sup>14</sup> See Pochman, *German Culture in America*; Leidecker, *Yankee Teacher*.

<sup>15</sup> Leidecker, *Yankee Teacher*.

<sup>16</sup> Leidecker, *Yankee Teacher*.

<sup>17</sup> John Lysaker, *Emerson and Self-Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008).

<sup>18</sup> William Torrey Harris, *Hegel's Logic: A Book on the Genesis of the Categories of Mind. A Critical Exposition* (New York: Kraus Reprints, 1890), 105.

<sup>19</sup> Harris, *Hegel's Logic*, 105.

<sup>20</sup> Harris and Doty, *A Statement*.

addenda to Rosenkranz's *The Philosophy of Education* (1886),<sup>21</sup> his own *Psychological Foundations of Education* in 1898,<sup>22</sup> and his voluminous lectures and talks, Harris was able to spread his peculiar brand of Hegelian idealism far and wide. His position as the first U.S. Commissioner of Education (1889) only served to cement his legacy.

Despite the volume of Harris' essays and lectures, no single book-length manuscript volume was published until *Psychological Foundations of Education* in 1898. In the interim, Harris penned numerous articles that influenced school leaders as well as the Cambridge philosophic establishment and beyond.<sup>23</sup> Among the most important was "A Statement of the Theory of Education in the United States," written for the Vienna World Exposition of 1872 in conjunction with Duane Doty of the United States Office of Education.<sup>24</sup> In this, Harris places the school as a "social institution between family life and specialized vocational training."<sup>25</sup> Owing to "the comparative lack of family nurture," the theory of education's primary function in the United States is to "make more prominent the moral phase of education."<sup>26</sup> Harris follows Hegel's divisions of State and Civil Society, assigning law-making and giving to the former, and to the latter, "the supply of human wants and necessities through the creation and distribution of wealth."<sup>27</sup> It is from the community (Hegel's civil society) that "directive intelligence" emanates, and it is the "individual" who benefits from "free popular education" if the community is established in such a way that the latter takes place.<sup>28</sup> Hand in hand with the free education of all is the "free development of productive industry," which supplies the leisure necessary for the "cultivation of intelligence" to direct public affairs. And this is in turn necessary for democracy.<sup>29</sup>

We see Harris's contribution to a philosophy of education in his preface and addenda to Rosenkranz's, *The Philosophy of Education*. Rosenkranz's manuscript was a translation in 1886 of a series of articles written in German and first published in *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* from 1872-1874. Harris supplied addenda in the form of commentary following each paragraph of Rosenkranz's. Rosenkranz's volume was the first legitimate book-length philosophy of education text published in America and should be considered the very first of its kind, for it contained metaphysical, logical, epistemological, and ethical presuppositions for the various practices of teaching and learning, the curriculum, and the school. It will do to examine the text, and in particular, Harris's addenda, more closely. One aspect Harris thinks the philosophy of education ought to emphasize is close attention to freedom.

The nature of education is determined by the nature of Mind or Spirit, whose activity is always devoted to realizing for itself what it is potentially—to becoming conscious of its possibilities, and to getting them under the control of its will. Mind is potentially free. Education is the means by which man seeks to realize in man his possibilities (to develop the possibilities of the [human] race in each individual). Hence, education has freedom for its object.<sup>30</sup>

Freedom in respect of will is "subjective spirit," and includes "anthropology, phenomenology, and psychology."<sup>31</sup> Will, in turn, is "practical" and has its basis in "the investigation of the nature of freedom, and the process of securing it by self-emancipation from

<sup>21</sup> Rosenkranz, *Philosophy*.

<sup>22</sup> William Torrey Harris, *Psychological Foundations of Education* (New York: Appleton, 1898).

<sup>23</sup> Leidecker, *Yankee Teacher*.

<sup>24</sup> Leidecker, *Yankee Teacher*; Harris and Doty, *A Statement*.

<sup>25</sup> Harris and Doty, *A Statement*, 13.

<sup>26</sup> Harris and Doty, *A Statement*, 13.

<sup>27</sup> Harris and Doty, *A Statement*, 12.

<sup>28</sup> Harris and Doty, *A Statement*, 12.

<sup>29</sup> Harris and Doty, *A Statement*, 12.

<sup>30</sup> Harris, in Rosenkranz, *Philosophy*, 20.

<sup>31</sup> Harris, in Rosenkranz, *Philosophy*, 11.

nature.”<sup>32</sup> Harris stresses the dualism between nature and freedom in this and other passages. Indeed, this would become something of a motif for Harris; nature was always external to mind, to spirit. Even the Absolute, as freedom, was considered antithetical to nature: Harris, unlike Hegel, never brooked the sublation of nature and freedom in a further whole. Freedom is manifest in the individual as will. The business of education is the discipline and training of the will. The will, first disciplined, learns to emancipate itself through taking on the habits, customs, roles, and norms of the teacher, who in turn represents Civil Society. “The science of education presupposes the conscious exertion of influence on the part of the will of the teacher upon the will of the pupil, with a purpose in view—that of inducing the pupil to form certain prescribed habits, and adopt prescribed views and habits.”<sup>33</sup> The full internalization of the social or general will is the beginning of the individual will’s self-activity; self-emancipation.

Another aspect is attention to the divine. Harris claims Rosenkranz (unlike Hegel), “very properly makes [Christian] religious education the last and highest form of the particular elements of education.”<sup>34</sup> Harris comments in Rosenkranz’s chapter on The Nature of Education that, “Education, taken in its widest compass, is the education of the human race by Divine Providence. Here education is recognized to include much more than the “conscious exertion of influence...”<sup>35</sup> Yet another aspect is stress on the cultivation of the individual. Following Rosenkranz, Harris understands “education” as the “influence of the individual upon the individual, exerted with the object of developing his powers in a conscious and methodical manner, either generally or in special directions, the educator being relatively mature, and exercising authority over the relatively immature pupil.”<sup>36</sup> Paramount in this cultivation is “the development of the individual into the theoretical and practical reason immanent in him.”<sup>37</sup> But whereas a romantic or expressivist could be forgiven for thinking that the social environment molds an individual to become what she is, Harris is adamant that education plays no such role. “Education can not create; it can only help to develop to reality what was already a possibility; it can only help to bring to light the hidden life...Education does not create, but it emancipates. It does not make self-activity, but it influences it to develop itself.”<sup>38</sup> Harris’s (though not Rosenkranz’s) Hegel is an individualist in matters of social influence.

It was never Harris’s intention to simply make Hegel respectable to the American intellectual elite; it was always his intention to filter Hegel through the American psyche. And this psyche was an individualist one, with a frontier spirit, of which Harris himself (through leaving New England to reside in St. Louis) was emblematic. Harris did not think a figure such as Hegel could be neatly absorbed into the American *Zeitgeist*; rather, he must be reconstructed for American wants and needs.<sup>39</sup> Thus, he was particularly sensitive regarding the uptake of intellectual figures. What this netted for a science of education was a philosophic backdrop of idealism that was America-centric. It would emphasize individualism over communitarianism; the divine over secular psychology and philosophy; intellectual development over vocational training, and (speculative) metaphysics over materialism and naturalism. We shall see this writ large when we return to the debate between Dewey and Harris over the direction of science of education in 1895.

Though Harris became a founding member of the short-lived Herbart Society in 1895, there is little extant information regarding his specific involvement.<sup>40</sup> Harris carried on a correspondence with Charles De Garmo, first president of the Herbart Society; a

<sup>32</sup> Harris, in Rosenkranz, *Philosophy*, 11.

<sup>33</sup> Harris, in Rosenkranz, *Philosophy*, 11.

<sup>34</sup> Harris, in Rosenkranz, *Philosophy*, viii.

<sup>35</sup> Harris, in Rosenkranz, *Philosophy*, 21.

<sup>36</sup> Harris, in Rosenkranz, *Philosophy*, 23.

<sup>37</sup> Harris, in Rosenkranz, *Philosophy*, 23.

<sup>38</sup> Harris, in Rosenkranz, *Philosophy*, 26-27.

<sup>39</sup> Harris and Doty, *A Statement*.

<sup>40</sup> Leidecker, *Yankee Teacher*.

correspondence that picked up after De Garmo's return from completing his doctorate at Halle in 1892. But Harris lacked De Garmo's enthusiasm for Herbart. Furthermore, he rejected what he saw as a key component of De Garmo's psychology; Herbart's empirical theory of will. Will, for Herbart (or so Harris thought) grew out of human desires. As such, there was, for Herbart, no metaphysical basis to the will. Harris abhorred this. Following Hegel and Rosenkranz, Harris saw freedom as the apex of history and self-consciousness. To denigrate freedom through making it subservient to natural desires Harris thought repugnant.<sup>41</sup> Harris never provided a full philosophy of education for the organization, nor did he ever publish a manuscript that constituted one. In addition to the addenda he provided for Rosenkranz's *The Philosophy of Education*, the closest he came was the 1898 philosophical creed published in Ossian Lang's *Educational Creeds of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century*, his 1898 *Psychologic Foundations of Education*,<sup>42</sup> which dealt with the role of psychology in teaching and learning, the curriculum, and the schools, and the *Report of the Committee of Fifteen*,<sup>43</sup> sponsored by the National Education Association in 1893 and reported in February, 1895 (Leidecker 1971, Harris 1895).<sup>44</sup> Harris, on behalf of the other 14 members, outlined his world-view of an education system for elementary schoolchildren; a world-view that stressed the logical steps of the science of education in a progression to the cultural epoch at present-- *fin de siècle* America (Harris, 1895).<sup>45</sup> Each branch of study represents a grouping of further studies that form a phase or aspect of a collective mind (Harris 1895).<sup>46</sup> The powers of mind are spiritual powers and are to be exercised along the analogy of gymnastics (Harris 1895).<sup>47</sup> Nevertheless, both faculty psychology (Harris had in mind the Scottish "common-sensism" of Thomas Reid, Dugald Stewart, and their followers) and the newer, materialistic psychology of the brain, were to be subordinated to a psychology of the whole mind—a "psychology of civilization"—in which family, civil society, the state and the church are the leading social institutions.<sup>48</sup> While certainly inclusive of these, Harris's psychology is tantamount to Hegel's *Geist*—self-consciousness as it reaches to the Absolute.<sup>49</sup> Psychology, which for Harris meant a "psychology of civilization," was stressed in teacher-training.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, "the laws of psychology...are themselves the fundamental laws of teaching."<sup>51</sup> The curriculum was accordingly ordered into 5 branches, including mathematics, literature, grammar and language, logic and psychology. Additionally, Harris ordered a sixth branch - "religion" (Harris 1895, pp. 9-22).<sup>52</sup> Harris expanded on these branches in his 1898 publication, *Psychologic Foundations of Education*.

By 1895, then, Harris had in place various components for a full philosophy of education, though not a full philosophy of education. To begin with, he had Rosenkranz's lengthy manuscript, *The Philosophy of Education*, to which he added numerous passages, oftentimes making specific reference to the American scene. Additionally, Harris had an account of metaphysics, the divine as Absolute; a logic, a systematic curriculum of 5 branches building onto one another; an ethics of freedom and practical living; and a politics of

<sup>41</sup> William Torrey Harris, "Reply to De Garmo's 'Is Herbart's Theory of Interest Dangerous?'" *Public School Journal* XIV (June, 1895): 575-76.

<sup>42</sup> William Torrey Harris, *Psychological Foundations*.

<sup>43</sup> William Torrey Harris, "Report of the Subcommittee on the Correlation of Studies in Elementary Education," in *Report of the Committee of Fifteen on Elementary Education* (New York: American Book Co., 1895), 2.

<sup>44</sup> Leidecker, *Yankee Teacher*; Harris, "Report of the Subcommittee."

<sup>45</sup> Harris, "Report of the Subcommittee."

<sup>46</sup> Harris, "Report of the Subcommittee."

<sup>47</sup> Harris, "Report of the Subcommittee."

<sup>48</sup> Harris, "Report of the Subcommittee," 7.

<sup>49</sup> Harris, *Hegel's Logic*.

<sup>50</sup> Harris, "Report of the Subcommittee," 99, 101.

<sup>51</sup> Harris, "Report of the Subcommittee," 102.

<sup>52</sup> Harris, "Report of the Subcommittee," 9-22.



American individualism against a backdrop of human civilization. Harris followed Rosenkranz's Hegelian lead, in which a child is led through phases of subject-matters to a final destination—civilization as self-consciousness. For Harris, this was a Christian, protestant religious destination in which the self-consciousness of the child is at one with the Absolute of her civilization. Freedom as the absolute equivalence of individual self-consciousness and whole (as civilization) is thereby gained. Curricular subjects and modes of pedagogy are so many aspects of this whole, with the job of self-consciousness to develop and re-develop itself in pursuit of its end—the Absolute. The curriculum never leads; never teaches if teaching is congruent with guiding forward. For this is the business of self-consciousness and self-consciousness is the responsibility of the child; the curriculum merely accompanies this development. Education for Harris, then, was a matter of, and for, psychology; that is to say, self-consciousness in Hegel's senses of Subjective Spirit: anthropology, phenomenology, and especially psychology (Hegel 1990). And this Absolute is found in history, as freedom, as civilization. The Absolute was divine and could be intuited from speculation upon final ends; this was the upshot to Harris's *Psychological Foundations of Education* (1898). And, as Harris thought the United States had a unique historical destiny to play in grasping this civilization, so it had a unique destiny in grasping the Absolute.

### Harris, Dewey, and the Herbart Debates

What makes the debates an issue for philosophy of education beyond their obvious importance for the intellectual history and biography of Harris and Dewey is the sea change in philosophic thinking occurring as these individual accounts began to battle for supremacy in the American scholarly milieu at the *fin de siècle*. The tensions between the established Absolute idealism represented by Harris's science of education, his endorsement of Rosenkranz and his intuitionist interpretation of Hegel, and the burgeoning instrumentalism of Dewey were redolent of the transformation of American philosophy at the time. Indeed, we might say that the debate between the two served as microcosm for the larger contest taking place. By the early 1890's, *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* was no longer the only journal discussing philosophic topics in America, and ceased publishing in 1893 after Harris's abdication from senior editorship (Leidecker 1971).<sup>53</sup> In 1887, Paul Carus began publishing scholarship in intellectual history under the Open Court label. In 1894, *The Psychological Review* under the editorship of G. Stanley Hall began publication, and this served as a venue for scholarly articles dealing with philosophical psychology, the theory of knowledge, and mind. As well, the British journals, *Mind* and *The Monist* published more and more American scholarship. Though articles espousing idealist accounts were present in all of these journals, experimental and physiological psychology, together with naturalist and evolutionary accounts of behaviour, began to burgeon. Furthermore, academic scholarship in America began to reflect a distinct bias towards functionalism, physiological psychology, evolutionary biology, and organic accounts of mind and reality, owing to the increasing prevalence of German-trained psychologists and psychologically-minded philosophers in major academic positions across leading graduate departments—G. Stanley Hall at Johns Hopkins and later, Clark University perhaps the most representative of these. This bias towards psychology roughly coincided with the death in 1889 of G.S. Morris, the leading non-St. Louis Hegelian in America and Dewey's erstwhile supervisor. By 1900, with the publication of Josiah Royce's 1899 *The World and the Individual*, the tide had already begun to turn against idealism (Royce 1899).<sup>54</sup> 1895 would be the year that idealism's ascendancy in matters of education was challenged. It will do to examine the debate in detail.

<sup>53</sup> Leidecker, *Yankee Teacher*.

<sup>54</sup> Josiah Royce, *The World and the Individual*, vol. 1 (New York: Macmillan and Co., 1899).

The turn to pragmatism in educational thought is a turning away from Absolute idealism in its various guises. There is undoubtedly for Dewey a general turning away from British idealism and its American cousin; the question of the turning away from Hegelian idealism remains an open question. To begin with, the scope and degree of this turn is hotly debated in the Dewey scholarship.<sup>55</sup> Additionally, what counts as idealism is frequently in question in the various claims for against its influence on Dewey.<sup>56</sup> By all accounts, at the time Dewey arrived in Chicago in July 1894 to take his positions as professor of philosophy and professor of pedagogy, Dewey's idealism was already tempered by his reading and incorporation of various Jamesian motifs. The turn from Absolute idealism is one that historians and biographers correctly describe as slow and almost imperceptible.<sup>57</sup> The years 1891-1894 are central to this turn, for the pragmatism that Dewey proposes (often under various other names, such as experimental idealism, instrumentalism, experimentalism, the method of intelligence) begins in earnest in these years. We see in mid-1891 Dewey still attempting to render James's functionalist and naturalistic psychology in Hegelian terms (Dewey to James, 1891-05-06, 00458).<sup>58</sup> This desire begins to fade shortly thereafter. Though Dewey would lecture on Hegel in 1891 and later, 1897,<sup>59</sup> he would gradually cease clothing his novel ideas in Hegelian "garb."<sup>60</sup> Dewey's criticism of those that slavishly follow the master on matters of metaphysics, instead of attending to social and practical concerns, is already a fixture by late 1893: Dewey would tell James Rowland Angell that "While I continue to get more and more out of Hegel, I get less and less out of the Hegelians so-called. They seem to be largely repeating phrases when they ought to be analyzing the subject matter. Metaphysics has had its day, and if the truths which Hegel saw cannot be stated as direct, practical truths, they are not true" (Dewey to Angell 1893 10, 5, 00478).<sup>61</sup> By late 1894, he had broadly embraced the functionalist language of scholars working in the fields of physiologic and experimental psychology,<sup>62</sup> though it is worthy of note that in 1897, Dewey is still attempting to cast the broad, Hegelian motif of the Absolute in terms of nature-spirit-self.<sup>63</sup> Dewey's earliest forays into educational psychology and theory evidence this slow and imperceptible turn. We see in "The Chaos in Moral Training"<sup>64</sup> a critique

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<sup>55</sup> Dykhuizen, *The Life and Mind*; Robert Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991); John Shook, *Dewey's Empirical Theory of Knowledge and Reality* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2000); Thomas Dalton, *Becoming John Dewey: Dilemmas of a Philosopher and Naturalist* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002); James Good, *A Search for Unity in Diversity. The "Permanent Deposit" of Hegel in John Dewey's Philosophy* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006); James Garrison, "The 'Permanent Deposit' of Hegelian Thought in Dewey's Theory of Inquiry," *Educational Theory* 56, no. 1 (2006): 1-36; John Dewey, "The 1897 Lecture on Hegel," in *John Dewey's Philosophy of Spirit, with the 1897 Lecture on Hegel*, eds. John Shook and James Good (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010).

<sup>56</sup> See Shook, *Dewey's Empirical Theory*; Dewey, *John Dewey's Philosophy*.

<sup>57</sup> See John Dewey, *The Collected Works of John Dewey*. 37 vols., *Early Works, 1882-1898*; *Middle Works, 1899-1924*; *Later Works, 1925-1953*. ed. JoAnn Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1967-1991), *Later Works* 5: 151; Dykhuizen, *The Life and Mind*; Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy*; Feffer, *The Chicago Pragmatists*; Ryan, *John Dewey and the High Tide*.

<sup>58</sup> *The Correspondence of John Dewey* vol 1: 1866-1918, ed. L. Hickman (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press 2001-2003).

<sup>59</sup> Dewey, "The 1897 Lecture on Hegel."

<sup>60</sup> Dewey, *Later Works*, 5:151.

<sup>61</sup> John Dewey, *The Correspondence*, 10, 5.

<sup>62</sup> Dykhuizen, *The Life and Mind*; Westbrook, *John Dewey*; Feffer, *The Chicago Pragmatists*; Ryan, *John Dewey and the High Tide*; Dalton, *Becoming John Dewey*.

<sup>63</sup> Dewey, "The 1897 Lecture on Hegel," 119.

<sup>64</sup> Dewey, *Early Works*, 4:109.

of intuitionism with James as backdrop. Likewise, in “The Psychology of Infant Language,” Dewey stresses the need to examine closely “individual differences” in children’s assimilation of adverbs.<sup>65</sup>

Beginning 1895, Dewey’s educational and psychological writings, thin as they were, brought him enough attention to warrant a membership on the executive council to the Herbart Society. An outgrowth of the National Educational Association, De Garmo and Charles McMurry took the idea of a Herbart Club—itsself an outgrowth of the 1892 National Educational Association convention—and formalized it as an institution.<sup>66</sup> The very first meeting was held in Denver at the National Educational Association annual convention. Both Dewey and Harris were present. The emergent publication was entitled, *The First Yearbook of the Herbart Society for the Scientific Study of Teaching: Prepared for Discussion at the Denver Meeting 1895 of the National Educational Association*, and was edited by McMurry (1896). Dewey’s *Interest in Relation to Training of the Will*<sup>67</sup> was published as a second supplement to the *Yearbook*. At approximately the same time, De Garmo published “Is Herbart’s Theory of Interest Dangerous?”<sup>68</sup> In the debate regarding Herbart’s denial of metaphysical principles to the will, Dewey sided with De Garmo against Harris.<sup>69</sup>

Though Dewey and Harris corresponded amicably, if only occasionally, the debate over Herbartianism in education drew them into conflict with one another. Harris was of course firmly entrenched in his intuitionist reading of Hegel long before the publication of *Hegel’s Logic* (1890). For his part, Dewey drew from numerous writings in formulating his various criticisms against Harris. These included Harris’s entries for *Johnson’s Universal Cyclopaedia*, edited by Charles Kendall Adams (1894), Harris’s critical piece on Herbartian pedagogy, entitled “Herbart’s Doctrine of Interest (1895); and various “Reports of the Superintendent” to the St. Louis Schools’ Board of Directors, spanning the previous 25 years.<sup>70</sup> Perhaps most importantly, Dewey read the “Report of the Subcommittee on the Correlation of Studies in Elementary Education,” which Harris edited and supervised for publication in 1895. Altogether, twenty separate sources are cited by Dewey on Harris for the period 1895-1898 (EW 5).<sup>71</sup> Dewey would critique Harris directly in 1898 in a review of the latter’s *Psychologic Foundations of Education*. By this time, Dewey had established provocative counter-claims to Harris’s idea of the science of education. However, the intellectual work took place not in 1898 with Dewey’s critique, rather in 1894-1895 with the lead-up to Dewey’s most significant published statement on educational psychology to that point: *Interest in Relation to Training of the Will*.<sup>72</sup>

The will is the chief concern of *Interest* and much of the text consists in an emphasis away from metaphysical conceptions of the will towards naturalist and functional characterizations. Now Harris had decried naturalism as a motive force in a science of education. The fear was that too much attention to lower drives would impede the development of the higher, rational ones. This, as well as Harris’s intuitionist reading of Hegel and his importance for religion in schools has led numerous commentators to judge him as a “conservative.”<sup>73</sup> However, this is not how Dewey saw Harris; though Dewey thought it

<sup>65</sup> Dewey, *Early Works*, 4:66-67.

<sup>66</sup> Erwin Johannmeyer and Theresa Richardson, *Educational Research, the National Agenda, and Educational Reform* (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, 2008).

<sup>67</sup> William Torrey Harris, “Dewey’s Doctrine,” 486-93.

<sup>68</sup> Charles De Garmo, “Is Herbart’s Theory of Interest Dangerous?” *Public School Journal* xiv (May 1895): 514-515.

<sup>69</sup> Dewey, *Early Works*, 5.

<sup>70</sup> Harris, “Report of Subcommittee.”

<sup>71</sup> Dewey, *Early Works*, 5.

<sup>72</sup> Harris, “Dewey’s Doctrine.”

<sup>73</sup> See Lawrence Cremin, *American Education: The Metropolitan Experience* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988); Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy*; Feffer, *The Chicago Pragmatists*.

lamentable that Harris put his efforts into denying the new trends in elementary school pedagogy, specifically activity and practice, he thought Harris himself was philosophically progressive.<sup>74</sup> Indeed, neither Hegel nor Harris is Dewey's direct concern in *Interest*, and Hegel is not mentioned; two philosophies, or rather, one philosophy and one science of education, are of concern. The first is Kantian moral theory; the second, Herbart's pedagogy. Characteristically, Dewey decries the dualism between these two that keeps what is good and right of each apart from the other.<sup>75</sup> But, as the metaphysical conception of the will is at the heart of the dualism, and this is a conception central to Harris's science of education, it will do to examine Dewey's account of the will and how it differs from Harris's.

To begin with, Harris's understanding of human will was bound up with his Hegelian understanding of self-consciousness; it was self-activity. As such, it consisted in self-consciousness in the sphere or domain of action. And human activity is ultimately "ethical".<sup>76</sup> No doubt, the broadly Hegelian understanding of human self-activity as ethical is shared by Dewey as well. What distinguishes Harris from Dewey is the further insistence that this will have a metaphysical basis; to wit, an intuitionist basis that Harris qualifies as "Absolute."<sup>77</sup> And as we have seen, what this Absolute in respect of will means, for Harris, is "freedom."<sup>78</sup> This is "subjective Spirit," or "Practical" reason; it is the Absolute self-activity of the child in her development with assistance from the "science of education," whose business it is to 'form certain prescribed habits and adopt prescribed views and habits.'<sup>79</sup> And Harris admits that the education of humankind is "divine providence" (Harris, in Rosenkranz 1886, p. 21).<sup>80</sup>

Dewey rejects divine providence as a suitable foundation for freedom. (Rosenkranz does as well (Rosenkranz, 1886 p. 20). Whereas Harris grounds freedom in the Absolute of divine providence, Dewey places freedom in the context of the child's self.<sup>81</sup> The net effect is to *internalize* freedom in respect of the human organism. Now, both Harris and Dewey place great stock in self-activity. But whereas Harris claims the providential business of the science of education is to give us a systematic method to subdue external nature, Dewey rejects this in favour of a notion of nature that is already internal to self. In 1895, freedom is equated to "spontaneous power:"<sup>82</sup> the child's "spontaneous power" cannot be suppressed. At the same time, it is a "demand for realization of his own impulses."<sup>83</sup> The "externality of the object or idea to be mastered, the end to be reached, the act to be performed," is an assumption that has its basis in the dualism of mind and world.<sup>84</sup> But this is a false dualism, for the self, in putting forth its end-in-view, *already* has the object, and has it as ideal. Nature turns out not to be external to self; it turns out that nature is the externality of the self as the self, grasping its object through its ideal. Self-activity, which is the power represented here, re-emerges in new garb: no longer is it the chief characteristic and function of Mind; it is now a basic consideration in a functionalist psychological account of the child's behaviour. There is no need for an appeal to divine providence to provide metaphysical support to a dualism of mind and nature because, in an organic accounting of self, mind and nature are the internal and external aspects of self-as-whole. This "identification, through action," of the self to its object, Dewey calls "interest," in

<sup>74</sup> Dewey, *Early Works*, 5:382.

<sup>75</sup> E.g., Dewey, *Early Works*, 5:137-138.

<sup>76</sup> Harris in Rosenkranz, *Philosophy*, 27, 115.

<sup>77</sup> Harris in Rosenkranz, *Philosophy*, 10.

<sup>78</sup> Harris in Rosenkranz, *Philosophy*, 10-11.

<sup>79</sup> Harris in Rosenkranz, *Philosophy*, 11.

<sup>80</sup> Harris in Rosenkranz, *Philosophy*, 21.

<sup>81</sup> Dewey, *Early Works*, 5:117-118.

<sup>82</sup> Dewey, *Early Works*, 5:119.

<sup>83</sup> Dewey, *Early Works*, 5:119.

<sup>84</sup> Dewey, *Early Works*, 5:117.

contrast to the separation of self and object, which requires “effort” to overcome.<sup>85</sup> In dropping the Hegelian “garb,” Dewey manages to provide a rival, and naturalistic, accounting of self and its functions to the accounting of Harris.

Dewey was not present at the first public response to his presentation at the National Education Association’s 1895 meeting; the Herbart Round Table meeting at Jacksonville, Florida, February 20, 1896. The minutes of the meeting were taken down anonymously and there is no verbatim transcript of the discussants. Harris, however, was present at that meeting and allegedly claimed Dewey’s presentation was taken from the standpoint of Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*. He further claimed on the part of Dewey that “Will is the centre and core of the highest pure being. God makes a universe of freedom of evolution.”<sup>86</sup> Of course, Dewey said no such thing in *Interest*. Nor would he have; for it was just this idea of divine providence Dewey attempted to repudiate with a rival theory of interest. What there was of Hegel in Dewey’s account was duly naturalised; the whole of Hegel’s Absolute was an organism acting and reacting in and upon an environment, and the will was the “identification through action” of the self in its relationship to its object.<sup>87</sup> Harris formally responded to Dewey’s *Yearbook* supplement in a lengthy note published in *Educational Review* (Harris 1896).<sup>88</sup> Officially, the battle between the two rival accounts (for Dewey had yet to publish a philosophy of education, though he was in the midst of delivering lectures on the philosophy of education to his graduate students and the University of Chicago) had begun. Upon the publication of Harris’s *Psychologic Foundations in Education* (1898), Dewey published a lengthy review.<sup>89</sup> Correspondence between the two remained cordial; though neither vacated his philosophic position.<sup>90</sup> In 1896, Dewey would go on to publish “The Reflex Arc Concept in Psychology”<sup>91</sup>—perhaps the most important of his psychological articles—and the Jamesian intellectual legacy would be cemented. The following year saw the publication of “My Pedagogic Creed,” for Ossian Lang’s *Educational Creeds of the Nineteenth Century* (1898)<sup>92</sup>—Dewey’s first attempt approaching a science of education. Indeed, the years 1895-1898 saw Dewey publish no less than thirteen articles and books on educational topics. By 1898, then, Dewey was well on his way to providing material for his nascent philosophy of education, which bore full fruit only in 1916 with the publication of *Democracy and Education*.<sup>93</sup> Harris would pass away in 1909, and, partly without his support, idealism gradually lost its place as a bona fide philosophy of education in North America. The intellectual tide turned against Germany and German ideas in the run-up to, and during, the First World War; this disillusionment had as much to do with idealism’s demise as strictly philosophic factors and the presence of rivals (Campbell 2004).<sup>94</sup>

## Conclusion

<sup>85</sup> Dewey, *Early Works*, 5:121-122.

<sup>86</sup> Harris, in Dewey, *Early Works*, 5:147.

<sup>87</sup> Harris, in Dewey, *EW* 5, 147.

<sup>88</sup> Harris, “Dewey’s Doctrine.”

<sup>89</sup> Dewey, *Early Works*, 5.

<sup>90</sup> James Scott Johnston, “Rival Readings of Hegel at the *Fin de Siecle*: The Case of William Torrey Harris and John Dewey,” *History of Education* 42, no 4 (2013): 423-443.

<sup>91</sup> Dewey, *EW* 5.

<sup>92</sup> Ossian Lang, *Educational Creeds of the Nineteenth Century* (New York and Chicago: E.L. Kellogg and Co., 1898).

<sup>93</sup> Dewey, *MW* 9.

<sup>94</sup> James Campbell, “John Dewey and German Philosophy in Wartime,” *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 40, no. 1 (2004): 1-20.

“From this definition of its method it is apparent that the question of the philosophy of education is this, what are the implications of education? What does the empirical nature of education as already defined through the related sciences of fact suggest as to its ultimate nature.?” (Horne, 1904).<sup>95</sup>

The 1895 presentation to the Herbart Society of Dewey’s *Interest in Relation to Training of the Will* was the first shot across the bow in the battle for control of what was becoming philosophy of education in America. Many of the guns of pragmatism later to be marshalled against idealism as Harris extolled it are first displayed there, in relief. Rosenkranz’s *The Philosophy of Education*, in conjunction with Harris’s reports, addenda, and pedagogical writings, had given America its first philosophy of education. Harris had added to *The Philosophy of Education* and to his own science of education a peculiar intuitionist interpretation of Hegel and the corresponding Absolute; an Absolute which was equivalent to freedom, subjectively understood as self-consciousness, or self-activity. This self-activity was practical-ethical, and the role of the science of education was to develop in the child the attitudes and habits of this practical-ethical self-activity. All of this was grounded metaphysically in a notion of will as freedom, itself beholden to a divine providence set off against nature and the natural impulses of the child. Against this, Dewey would suggest a naturalistic account in which the dualism of mind and nature were but two aspects of one self, and the divide between the organism and nature was but a facet of the self’s own externalization of objects—an externalization that ‘taking an interest in’ obviates. Dewey would carry this latter sentiment into the writing of *School and Society* (1899) and later, *Democracy and Education* (1916).

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<sup>95</sup> Herman Harell Horne, *The Philosophy of Education; Being the Foundation of Education in the Related Natural and Mental Sciences* (New York: MacMillan, 1904), 14.

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