BRILL

WORLDVIEWS (2020) 1–32

WORLDVIEWS

brill.com/wo

Religion and Reconnecting with Nature

A Deweyian Reading of Leslie Silko's Ceremony*, and Vice-Versa*

Christopher D. DiBona

Department of Religious Studies, Brown University, Providence, RI, USA

chris_dibona@brown.edu

Abstract

Attention to the work of American pragmatist philosopher John Dewey and Native American novelist, poet, and essayist Leslie Silko reveals what are in many ways remarkably similar and complementary conceptualizations of religion, as both authors situate religion in the human's experienced alienation from and reconnection with the natural world, draw heavily on Romantic motifs in literary art to convey the "religious" dynamics of these experiences, and suggest that readers who sincerely engage with certain literary works of art can come to share in these dynamics in a way that has the potential to help reorient their everyday relations with and attitudes toward the natural world. Reading Dewey alongside Silko thus offers us an interdisciplinary set of resources to articulate and promote an ecological conception of religion founded on a mutualistic-symbiotic mode of human dwelling on the earth.

Keywords

John Dewey – Leslie Marmon Silko – religion and ecology – philosophy of religion – environmental ethics – religion and the arts

1 Introduction

Attention to the work of American pragmatist philosopher John Dewey and Native American novelist, poet, and essayist Leslie Silko reveals what are in many ways remarkably similar and complementary conceptualizations of religion, as both authors (1) situate religion in the human's experienced alienation from and reconnection with the natural world, with the natural sources of human life, (2) draw heavily on Romantic motifs in literary art to convey the

 | DOI:10.1163/15685357-20201003

"religious" dynamics of these experiences, and (3) suggest that readers who sincerely engage with certain literary works of art can come to share in these dynamics in a way that has the potential to help reorient their everyday relations with and attitudes toward the natural world. But whereas Dewey diagnoses this problem of alienation by way of a multilayered philosophical analysis of human experience and proposes a solution to it by way of a philosophical account of literary art's ability to transform the sincere reader's relation to the natural world, Silko diagnoses the problem and provides a solution to it, in large measure, through the production of an actual literary work of art, namely her acclaimed 1977 quasi-autobiographical poetic novel, *Ceremony*. Reading Dewey alongside Silko thus offers us a rich set of interdisciplinary resources that can be mobilized to articulate and promote an ecological conception of religion founded on a mutualistic-symbiotic[1] mode of human dwelling on the earth.[2] Furthermore, by highlighting the interrelation between religion, literary art, and reconnecting with the natural world in their thinking we not only gain a keener appreciation for Dewey as an environmental thinker[3] and for Silko as a philosopher[4] but we also are able to productively engage with some of the

1 I borrow the term "mutualistic-symbiotic" from the field of biology, where it refers to a relationship in which all individuals benefit from the association.

2 Philosophers Scott Pratt (Pratt 2002) and Bruce Wilshire (Wilshire 2000) have recently charted several fruitful connections between classical American pragmatism and Native American thought, arguing that some of the central commitments of the classical pragmatists are prefigured if not apparent much earlier in Northeast and Great Plains indigenous traditions. Neither author, however, considers the Dewey-Silko connection (Silko's tribe—the Laguna Pueblo—hail from west-central New Mexico). And both authors either neglect (Pratt) or only briefly take up (Wilshire) the importance of the religious dimension of experience to the classical pragmatists and thus overlook another fruitful point of contact between classical pragmatism and Native American thought and practice. My essay is intended, in part, to address these lacunae in the literature.

3 Hugh MacDonald (MacDonald 2004) has put forth the most substantive defense to date of the environmental promise of Dewey's thought in light of contemporary environmentalist critiques of Dewey's anthropocentrism and instrumentalism. MacDonald, however, entirely neglects the systematic role that the religious quality of experience plays in Dewey's thinking on the relation between human beings and the non-human natural world. Along similar lines, Steven Fesmire (Fesmire 2004, 43–63) has argued that Dewey's thought can be a resource for debates in animal ethics, but, like MacDonald, does not consider how Dewey's thinking on religion impacts his approach to such topics. This is an unfortunate oversight, as Dewey's abiding and systematic interest in the religious significance of the human-animal connection complements and converges with Fesmire's articulation of a Deweyian animal ethics (Fesmire 2004, 49) in interesting ways that warrant further analysis. Part of my aim in this essay is thus to draw attention to some of often-overlooked environmental implications and applications of Dewey's thinking on religion.

4 To the best of my knowledge, no study adequately calls attention to the pragmatic-philosophi-

tensions that exist between their work, especially regarding the role historical religious traditions can play in cultivating an ecological sensibility.

By way of preview, part one of this essay takes up Dewey's views concerning the human's relation with the rest of the natural world by way of his account of religion in *A Common Faith* (1934a) and his multilayered philosophical analysis of experience as it occurs across three of his major works: *Art as Experience* (1934b), *Experience and Nature* (1925), and *Democracy and Education* (1916). Here I reconstruct the distinctive "religious problem" of human existence that animates Dewey's thinking about the relation between the human and natural world as well as his views concerning literary art's ability to help resolve the "religious problem" by assisting in properly reconnecting the sincere reader with the natural world. Part two brings Dewey and Silko into conversation by showing how Silko's *Ceremony* and related essays on Laguna Pueblo "religion" are not only illuminated by but also critically enrich, concretize, challenge, and expand some of Dewey's core philosophical insights about the relation between religion, experience, art, and nature.

2 Dewey on Religion, Experience, and Nature

Dewey begins *A Common Faith* by drawing a distinction between the noun "religion" and the adjective "religious" (Dewey 1934a, 2–3), the former denoting the various codified beliefs and practices of different historical religious traditions and the latter denoting an experiential "quality" of being properly reconnected—in mind and body, in attitude and practice—with "the totality of conditions with which the self is connected" (Dewey 1934a, 19), with "the conditions of existence" (Dewey 1934a, 27; also see 14–16, 25–26).[5] Indeed, he underscores this sense of the word "religious" by turning to its etymological roots in the Latin *religare—re* (again) and *ligare* (to connect or unite). "According to the best authorities," he writes, "religion comes from a root that means being bound or tied" to "a particular way of life" or "general attitude" (Dewey

cal dimensions of Silko's novels and essays. Although Silko is briefly mentioned once in Sidern Larson's essay on pragmatism and American Indian thought as an instance of someone who fosters cultural change through what Richard Rorty calls "a talent for speaking differently, rather than arguing well" (Larson 1997, 7).

5 In this work, Dewey also refers to the religious quality of experience as "the religious phase of experience" (Dewey 1934a, 2), "the religious aspect of experience" (Dewey 1934a, 2), "the religious function in experience" (Dewey 1934a, 14), "the religious force of experience" (Dewey 1934a, 14–15) and "the religious element in life" (Dewey 1934a, 56).

1934a, 23).[6] The religious quality of experience thus connotes a way of life—a way of being-in-the-world—that properly recognizes, feels, and honors the totality of biosocial conditions in which we are connected and which support our existence.

Animating Dewey's desire to distance himself from traditional forms of "religion" is his skepticism about their "supernatural"[7] center of gravity (Dewey 1934a, 1–3). One of his central concerns in this regard is that religions based on the supernatural tend to draw their adherents' attention and energy away from the cultivation of better "relation[s] between nature and human ends and endeavors" (Dewey 1934a, 54) and thereby install a "fundamental dualism … in life" (Dewey 1934a, 73). For with the earth viewed as a stopover on the way to eternity and human agency imbued with an irredeemable sense of corruption and impotency (Dewey 1934a, 45–47), such religions tend to alienate humans and their individual and social endeavors from the natural sources of their existence (Dewey 1934a, 45–46, 54–55, 79–81) and thwart the dispositions and motivations required for engaging in cooperative projects geared toward practicably resolving pressing problems with regard to nature and society (Dewey 1934a, 8–9, 29–30, 46–47, 73–76). As Dewey writes, the supernatural "stand[s] in the way of the realization of distinctively religious values inherent in natural experience" (Dewey 1934a, 28) and "diverts attention and energy from ideal values and from the exploration of actual conditions by means which they may be promoted" (Dewey 1934a, 46). And thus, he concludes, religions based on the supernatural harbor an "essentially unreligious attitude" (Dewey 1934a, 25).

While Dewey acknowledges that religious "[t]radition and custom … are a part of the habits that have become one with our being" (Dewey 1934a, 15) his suspicions about the capacity of supernatural religions to aid in rendering salient the religious quality in one's interactions with nature prompt him to suggest that "we wipe the slate clean and start afresh by asking what would the idea of the unseen, of the manner of its control over us and the ways in which reverence and obedience would be manifested, if whatever is basically

6 Here Dewey aligns himself with a long, though not uncontested, Western tradition of conceiving of religion in line with this etymological derivation, which includes the Roman philosophical poet Lucretius, the distinguished early Christian philosophers Lactantius and St. Augustine of Hippo, and the English philosophical poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge, among others. For a helpful overview of the etymology of religion and its various uses in Western philosophical and theological thought see Sarah Hoyt's concise summary, "The Etymology of Religion" (Hoyt 1912, 126–129).

7 Dewey identifies the supernatural with unseen powers that have meaningful amounts of control over an individual's and a community's destiny and that are entitled to obedience, reverence, and worship (Dewey 1934a, 3).

religious in experience had the opportunity to express itself free from all historical encumbrances" (Dewey 1934a, 6), to "develop freely of its own account" (Dewey 1934a, 2) in the course of natural experience.[8]

For by "emancipat[ing] … elements and outlooks that may be called religious" (Dewey 1934a, 8) from their idiosyncratic supernatural baggage, he thinks he can articulate a "common faith" that, rather than relying upon supernatural revelation or sacred tradition for acquiring knowledge about living well, "trusts that the natural interactions between man and his environment will breed … intelligence and generate … knowledge … [that is] religious in quality" (Dewey 1934a, 26).[9] By drawing humans back to the earth and their earthly relations and sharpening their perception of the "possibilities of nature and associated living" (Dewey 1929, 306), Dewey's "religious faith" thus aims not only to cultivate "a better, deeper, and enduring adjustment in life" (Dewey 1934a, 15) and "a thoroughgoing and deep-seated harmonizing of the self with the Universe (as a name for the totality of conditions with which the self is connected)" (Dewey 1934a, 19) but also to "evoke heartfelt piety … toward nature … as the source of ideals, of possibilities, of aspiration … and as the eventual abode of all attained goods and excellences" (Dewey 1929, 306). In other words, Dewey thinks that religious faith in the possibilities of nature will engender in the faithful a pious responsiveness to and respect for nature as the source of those possibilities.

Turning to some Dewey's central corpus—especially *Art as Experience* (1934b), *Experience and Nature* (1925), and *Democracy and Education* (1916)—we find him systematically distinguishes between three modes of experience—primary experience, reflective experience, and consummatory experience—in

8 In the context of a discussion of Dewey's pluralism, Melvin Rogers suggests that Dewey's thinking on religion is not as hostile to specific religious institutions, beliefs, and rituals as some commentators have taken it to be. (Rogers 2008, 126–127; also see footnote 55). While Rogers is correct to emphasize Dewey's insistence on the ongoing importance of tradition for human inquiry and growth, his claim that Dewey is merely aiming to draw attention to the "absence of a *necessary* connection between specific beliefs and pious allegiance and faith" (Rogers 2008, 126) overlooks Dewey's ongoing aversion to forms of religion whose institutionally codified beliefs and practices are exclusively oriented toward some fixed conception of the supernatural in a way that hinders attentiveness and responsiveness to the religious quality inherent in human interactions with the non-human nature. Consider, for example, Dewey's claim that the category of the supernatural is to blame for "the present crisis of religion" (Dewey 1934a, 29–30).

9 Rockefeller (Rockefeller 1991, 487–499) and Rogers (Rogers 2008, 108–109) also pay careful attention to Dewey's emphasis on how our interactions with the natural environment (rather than a supernatural agent) can themselves foster the acquisition of "religious" knowledge and growth.

a way that illuminates the dynamics of alienation and reconnection that characterize his sketch of the religious quality of experience in *A Common Faith*.

Simply put, primary experience indicates the "live creature's" immediate, pre-reflective interactive unity with its surrounding environment, its "being bound up with its environment, not externally, but in the most intimate way" (Dewey 1934b, 12). Primary experience "recognizes … no division between act and material, subject and object, but contains them both in an unanalyzed totality" (Dewey 1925, 8). And because the self-reflective distance that is a necessary precondition for the instantiation of an epistemological subject-object distinction does not arise, primary experience "indicates a way of being and having things in ways other than knowing, in ways never identical with knowing them" (Dewey 1925, 377).

By contrast, reflective experience de-vivifies, discriminates, and fixes the external environment in an objective manner, effacing the experience's pre-reflective lived character. In reflective experience, in other words, one is no longer living *in the experience* but rather recognizes a distinction "between our own attitude and the object towards which we sustain the attitude" (Dewey 1916, 195), with these detached "attitudes … form[ing] a distinctive subject-matter of reflective … experience" (Dewey 1925, 12). And by fixing these attitudes as isolated and detached from the thing experienced, reflection effectively sunders "the integrated unity … of experience" (Dewey 1925, 19).

To illustrate the difference between primary and reflective experience Dewey gives the example of eating. From the perspective of primary experience, a man "does not divide his act into eating and *food*" (Dewey 1916, 196), for as the act of eating is pre-reflectively carried out and undergone subject and object seamlessly integrate in their co-interaction, which renders the experience unified and whole. But if we were to reflectively analyze the man's act of eating "the first thing we would effect is a discrimination [between] the properties of the nutritive material …. and the acts of the organism in appropriating and digesting" (Dewey 1916, 196). "Such reflection upon experience," he continues, thus "gives rise to a distinction of *what* we experience (the experienc*ed*) and the experienc*ing*—the *how*" (Dewey 1916, 196). And as Dewey goes on to explain, this distinction between the object experienced and the subjective act of experiencing gets posited in a wide range of instances so "there is the thing seen, heard, loved, hated, imagined, and there is the act of seeing, hearing, loving, hating, imagining, etc" (Dewey 1916, 196).

As a methodological device employed in certain forms of inquiry, Dewey does not object to the subject-object distinction employed in reflective experience, as it "is so natural and important for certain purposes" (Dewey 1916, 196). Indeed, he claims reflection "enriches and expands" the human organ-

ism's primary experience of the world and grants it "a far-reaching significance [it] did not previously have" (Dewey 1925, 5). For, through reflection, the various elements that comprise the world of primary experience "cease to be isolated details; they get the meaning contained in a whole system of related objects" (Dewey 1925, 5). Expressed here is the idea that primary experience, because of its pre-reflective immediate character, does not allow for the experiencer to apprehend in an intelligible and ordered manner the objects being experienced and the relations between them. In other words, at the level of primary experience meaning, or intelligibility, remains relatively concealed. The distantiation affected by reflection, however, provides the experiencer with a different way of accessing the experience such that the contents of primary experience appear in a mediated, intelligible, and interconnected light.

And yet, Dewey thinks that precisely because the distinction between "what we experience (the experienced) and the experiencing—the how … is so natural and important for certain purposes … we are only too apt to regard it as a separation in existence and not as a distinction in thought" (Dewey 1925, 5). Indeed, he considers this ontological reification of the methodological distinction between subject and object to be the standing and often succumbed to temptation of much of Western philosophy. Beginning with Plato and Aristotle (Dewey 1925, 90–94; Dewey 1929, 18–20) and continuing up through René Descartes and Baruch Spinoza (Dewey 1925, 19, 34), Dewey highlights the problematic tendency of Western philosophers to deploy a reflective theory of knowledge that treats (1) the "mind … [as] a spectator beholding the world from without and finding its highest satisfaction in the joy of self-sufficing contemplation" (Dewey 1929, 276) and (2) "the real object [as] the object so fixed in its regal aloofness that it is a king to any beholding mind that may gaze upon it" (Dewey 1929, 6). By "isolat[ing] … [objects] from the experience through which they are reached and in which they function," the spectator approach to the relation between self and world thus leaves us with "the absurdity of an experience which experiences only itself, states, and processes of consciousness, instead of the things of nature" (Dewey 1925, 11; also see 19). And by positing this ontological division wherein an untraversable ditch separates the experiencing self from the experienced world, Western philosophy thus tends to treat the self as "an unnaturalized and unnaturalizable alien in the world," effectively covering over the "ineradicable union" that inheres between them (Dewey 1925, 60).

Now although Dewey considers the distinction between the act of experiencing and the thing experienced to be, at root, a methodological one, he worries about how internalizing this distinction as if there actually existed a radical ontological caesura between the experiencing self and the experienced world

engenders very real dispositional consequences at the individual and social level. Citing Greek culture from the eighth to fifth centuries BCE, the medieval period, and even his own New England culture, Dewey describes how a culturally pervasive "gloomy temper of life"—one wherein human beings conceive of and feel themselves as fundamentally alienated from the natural sources of their existence—can come to dominate entire cultures and epochs of human history (Dewey 1925, 126, 251). Indeed, Dewey himself expresses such a temperament in a telling autobiographical remark.

> The sense of divisions and separations that were, I suppose, borne in upon me as a consequence of a heritage of New England culture, 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.
>
> DEWEY 1960, 10

Habituated from a young age into a pattern of reflective thinking that conceives of the experiencing self as ontologically isolated from the experienced world, Dewey thus seems to understand first-hand how the ontological reification of the methodological distinction between experiencing self and experienced world is more than theoretically problematic, as its pervasive background presence in the daily lives of eighteenth and nineteenth century New Englanders played a formative role in shaping his own downtrodden temperament and general sense of disconnectedness from the surrounding natural environment. Indeed, Dewey's posthumously published poetry gives us another glimpse into this dimension of his philosophy and personal experience. For example, in "The Child's Garden," he writes,

> Would God my feet might lead
> To that enclosed garden
> That had innocence for warden
> And hopes and dreams for Seed
> But freezing years did harden
> And shut me in this barren field
> Docks and thistle its only yield
> And I cannot find that enclosed garden.
>
> DEWEY 1977b, 19

Here, again, Dewey gives expression to the experienced sense of alienation and lack of fecundity that he thinks characterizes his own life ("And shut me

in this barren field / Docks and thistle its only yield") as well as to the deep yearning to experience a sense of re-connectedness with the natural sources of human life ("Would God my feet might lead / To that enclosed garden"). Taken together, then, Dewey's philosophical analyses, autobiographical remarks, and posthumously published poetry point to what can be understood as the *religious problem of human existence*—the loss of an experienced sense of unity between the human organism and its natural environment and a desire for its return.

Now that we have seen how the human organism "falls out of step with the march of surrounding things" (Dewey 1934b, 12) and how this "loss of integration with the environment" (Dewey 1934b, 14) spurs the human organism's desire "to get together what has been sundered" (Dewey 1925, 9), we can fruitfully situate this problem in the broader context of Dewey's thought by recalling that he thinks human beings are essentially problem-solving organisms (Dewey 1934b, 14–15, 45, 84, 143, 352; see also Dewey 1910, 11, 109, 168, 191). In general, Dewey thinks two approaches are available for human beings to solve problems—a systematic scientific approach and an aesthetic approach. The scientific approach deals with experience from a reflective standpoint and resolves problems in order to instrumentalize their solutions as premises for further problem solving (Dewey 1934b, 14–15, 76). The religious problem is thus not something that can be resolved by a scientific approach equipped with the operations of reflection alone, since it is the operations of reflection that rupture the unitive intimacy characteristic of primary experience in the first place. And while the separation brought about through these reflective operations is necessary for the development of human consciousness and philosophical and scientific thought, "[the] primitive relationships of the living being to its surroundings [remain] irrecoverable in distinct or intellectual [i.e., reflective] consciousness" (Dewey 1934b, 29).

Art, however, is uniquely well suited to resolve the religious problem. For art, on Dewey's account, solves problems by engendering in the audience a phenomenological approximation of the artist's own experience of grappling with and resolving a problem in the production of the artwork (Dewey 1934b, 39, 56, 70, 76, 82, 333), with "the external object, the product of art, [serving] as the connecting link between the artist and the audience" (Dewey 1934b, 111). As Dewey writes,

> [In order] to perceive, a beholder must *create* his own experience. And his creation must include relations comparable to those which the original producer underwent. They are not the same in any literal sense. But with the perceiver, as with the artist, there must be an ordering of the

> elements of the whole that is in form, although not in details, the same as the process of organization the creator of the work consciously experienced. Without an act of re-creation, the object is not perceived as a work of art. The artist selected, simplified, clarified, abridged, and condensed according to his interest. The beholder must go through these operations according to his point of view and interest.
>
> DEWEY 1934b, 56

The beholder thus integrates the work of art and the experience of the artist into herself, making it a part of her own attitudes and dispositions and thereby reorienting and expanding her own capacities for experience., "The enduring effect [of the work of art] upon those who perceive and enjoy will be an expansion of *their* sympathies, imagination, and sense" (Dewey 1934b, 347). Dewey names this "aesthetic communication"—the "process of creating participation, of making common [an experience] that had been isolated and singular" (Dewey 1934b, 253). And because "the artist cares in a peculiar way for the phase of experience in which union is achieved" (Dewey 1934b, 14), the right work of art can be of great assistance in helping resolve the religious problem. As it can help us to see "beyond the separation of experience from nature, of subject from object" and experience an "intense realization of … a peculiarly satisfying sense of unity … with the vast world beyond ourselves" (Dewey 1934b, 203). For the work of art renders deeply and vividly explicit in the beholder the unrealized yet actual possibilities for living when the human is properly reconnected with nature As Dewey writes, it "elicits possibilities that are interwoven within the texture of the actual" (Dewey 1934b, 359–360; also see 253, 279). Hence Dewey's claim that "the sense of communion generated by a work of art may take on a definitively religious quality" (Dewey 1934b, 282).

The resolution to the religious problem through art opens onto the third phase of experience: consummatory experience. In the "consummatory union of environment and organism … what has been sundered is [put back] together again" (Dewey 1925, 344/9; also see 84), as the human organism comes to "see and feel things as they compose an integral whole" (Dewey 1934b, 278; also see 37, 194). Here, then, in the consummatory experience, the religious quality of experience so central to Dewey's *A Common Faith* once again comes to the fore.[10]

10 That *Art as Experience* and *A Common Faith* were not only published in the same year but also in many ways converge around this theme of a religious reconnection with the non-human natural world further indicates a deep affinity between these two works that

Dewey draws upon the motif of "animal experience" to help convey a sense of this aesthetically induced consummatory religious re-union with the nonhuman natural world.

> The activities of the fox, the dog, and the thrush may stand as reminders and symbols of that unity of experience which we so fractionalize when work is labor, and thought withdraws us from the world. The live animal is fully present, all there, in all of its actions: in its wary glances, its sharp sniffings, its abrupt cocking of ears. All senses are equally on the *qui vive*. As you watch, you see the motion merging into sense and sense into motion—constituting that animal grace so hard for man to rival. What the live creature retains from the past and what it expects from the future operate as directions in the present.
>
> DEWEY 1934b, 18

For Dewey, animals seamlessly integrate into their environment, remaining fully present *in the experience* despite being stretched across time, and he positions the unitive intimacy of "animal grace" as an interpretive key—a symbol and reminder—for understanding the possibility for a religious reconnection between the human and the nonhuman natural world. To be sure, Dewey is not espousing an unbridled return to the animal's mode of being-in-the-world, for the experienced consummatory unity is one that has passed through and permanently appropriated aspects of the reflective phase of experience. He does, however, think that art—especially literary art—can convey a way of being-in-the-world that phenomenologically approximates the experience of animal grace: the state of childhood, a stopover between animality and adulthood. As he writes, "The actual religious quality in the experience [can be] brought about … by a passage of poetry that opens a new perspective" (Dewey 1934a, 11).

Crucial to understanding Dewey's privileging of literary art in this respect are his accounts of tools and language. For Dewey, "a tool … is a thing in which a connection, a sequential bond of nature is embodied [and] denotes a perception and acknowledgement of sequential bonds in nature" (Dewey 1925, 123). And moreover, he claims that language is the "tool of tools" (Dewey 1925, 168)

---

seldom gets mentioned by commentators. One notable exception to this oversight is Casey Haskins, who aptly claims that "Dewey's descriptions of religious experience and consummatory experience in the two texts, respectively, are so close as to be almost interchangeable" (Haskins 1992, 235).

and that the poets have mastered this tool, with their words representing "a continuation of natural processes" (Dewey 1925, 421). That the poet's words are embodied extensions of nature thus suggests, in a preliminary way, that they can facilitate the human's experienced re-connection with the non-human natural world. For they remain continuous with nature despite the mediation and reflexivity that all language use inevitably introduces, "absorb[ing] the intellectual into immediate qualities that are experienced through senses that belong to the vital body" (Dewey 1934b, 224–225) and "deliver[ing] the truth with a personal and a passionate force beyond the reach of [reflective] theory" alone (Dewey 1969, 112). By blending the unitive qualities of primary experience with the distantiation that characterizes reflective experience, poetic language thus simultaneously keeps company with two parties—abstract philosophical reflection and sensuous, instinctual immediacy. As Dewey puts the point, "the very thing in which poetry consists … is when reasoning takes an instinctive form like that of animal forms and movements" (Dewey, 1934b, 33). The poet's social vocation therefore lies in providing a social grammar conducive to properly reconnecting the human with the rest of the natural world.

Dewey cites the nature writings of W.H. Hudson, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and William Wordsworth to help illustrate how poetic language can merge sense and instinct with thought and reason in a way that forcefully expresses the reconnective power contained in the idea that "animal grace" is "implicit in the experience of the child" (Dewey 1934b, 131). Dewey's citation of Hudson reads:

> I was just a little wild animal running around on its hind legs, amazingly interested in the world in which it found itself … I feel when I am out of sight of living, growing grass, and out of the sounds of bird's voices and all rural sounds, that I am not properly alive … I rejoiced in colors, scents, in taste and touch: the blue of the sky, the verdure of earth, the sparkle of light on water, the taste of milk, of honey, the smell of dry or moist soil, of wind and rain, of herbs and flowers; the mere feel of a blade of grass made me happy.
>
> DEWEY 1934b, 130; also see DEWEY 1934b, 28–29

And citing Emerson, Dewey claims his "Nature" essay is written "quite in the spirit of the passage quote from Hudson" (Dewey 1934b, 29).

> Crossing a bare common, in snow puddles, at twilight, under a clouded sky, without having in my thoughts any occurrence of a special good fortune, I have enjoyed perfect exhilaration. I am glad to the brink of fear.

> In the woods, too, a man casts off his years, as the snake his slough, and at what period soever of life, is always a child. In the woods, is perpetual youth.[11]
>
> DEWEY 1934b, 29

And in an earlier work Dewey eulogizes Wordsworth's romantic vision of an underlying unity with nature experienced in childhood, with Wordsworth's famous depiction of the boy of Winander who earnestly tries to communicate with the owls of the woods likely in mind (see Wordsworth 2000, 444).

> The art which deals with nature is perfect and enduring just in the degree in which it reveals the fundamental unities which exist between man and nature. In Wordsworth's poetry of nature, for example, we do not find ourselves in a strange, unfamiliar land, we find Wordsworth penetrating into those revelations of spirit, of meaning in nature, of which we ourselves had already some dumb feeling, and this the poetry makes articulate. All products of creative imagination are unconscious testimonies to the unity of spirit which binds … man to nature in one organic whole.[12]
>
> DEWEY 1967, 174

For Dewey, then, these poets unearth a "deep seated memory of [this] underlying harmony, the sense of which haunts life like the sense of being founded on a rock" (Dewey 1934b, 17) by "recreating the experience of [their] childhood" (Dewey 1934b, 131) in poetic language.[13] And if we understand their poetic endeavors as attempts to grapple with their own unique senses of religious disequilibria and reunion with the natural world, then, on Dewey's theory of art, a sincere reader of their poetry would be in a position to imaginatively share, or participate in, the dynamics of their experiences from their own point of view and interest. In other words, on Dewey's theory of art, these nature poets have the capacity to "stir into activity resonances of dispositions acquired in primitive relationships of the living being to its surroundings" *in their readers* (Dewey 1934b, 29). Indeed, Dewey even suggests these "poets … [are] the true

11 Dewey does not explicitly cite the last two sentences of this passage from Emerson in *Art as Experience*, although the allusion is obvious. For the full quote see Emerson 1983, 10.

12 For more on Wordsworth's influence on Dewey see Rockefeller 1991, 65–69.

13 Dewey's insistence on the linguistic expressibility of the religious quality of experience pushes against Richard Gale's claim that Dewey is committed to a form of mystical ineffability regarding the qualities that permeate the sense of disequilibria and reunion between self and world. See Gale 2008, 17–19, 40–43.

meta-*physicians* of nature" (Dewey 1925, 116–117; my emphasis) on account of their ability to engender this therapeutic religious reconnection with the natural world. For by absorbing the language and concepts of these poets, readers become able to imaginatively identify with hitherto unforeseen deeds and possibilities for relating to the rest of the natural world.

Dewey cautions that such aesthetic communication is a rigorous and sobering endeavor. "The one who is too lazy, idle, or indurated in convention will not see or hear" (Dewey 1934b, 56). And moreover, he claims that while this linguistically catalyzed consummatory religious re-union "takes place easily [for] happy children [since] there are few obstructions to be overcome, few wounds to heal, few conflicts to resolve … with mature persons … the achievement of complete unison" is considerably more difficult (Dewey 1934b, 75), not only because of the need to overcome more wounds, conflicts, and obstructions but also because of the ingrained patterns of thinking, speaking, and acting that have been imposed by various institutionalized traditions (Dewey 1934a, 14). Nevertheless, Dewey seems confident that with sincerity and persistence even mature persons can achieve this experienced state of consummatory religious unity and that "when it occurs … the final expression issues with … the rhythmic movement of happy childhood" (Dewey 1934b, 75). Indeed, he even suggests in *A Common Faith* that "there is every reason to suppose that, in some degree of intensity, [experiences called religious] occur so frequently that they may be regarded as normal manifestations that take place at certain rhythmic points in the movement of experience" (Dewey 1934a, 37; also see Dewey 1934a, 10, 23, 37; Dewey 1934b, 194; Dewey 1929, 235).[14] And if we turn back to *Art as Experience* we see Dewey try to make good on this underdeveloped and provocative claim by calling attention to how the religious quality of experience is "woven into the texture of daily life" (Dewey 1920, 172; also see Dewey 1934b, 1–5, 9–12, 81–82). Dewey chooses the seemingly mundane example of moving a stone to illustrate his point.

> There are … common patterns in various experiences, no matter how unlike they are to one another in the details of their subject matter … The outline of the common pattern is set by the fact that every experi-

14 Here it is especially important to remind readers of the broader applications of Dewey's philosophy of religion by pointing to his insistence that the religious quality of experience inheres not only in interactions between the human and the non-human natural world but also wherever human activity is harmoniously integrated with the surrounding environment, as can happen in aesthetic, scientific, moral, personal, and political pursuits (Dewey 1934a, 10, 23).

> ence is the result of interaction between a live creature and some aspect of the world in which he lives. A man does something; he lifts, let us say, stone. In consequence he undergoes, suffers, something: the weight, strain, texture of the surface of the thing lifted. The properties thus undergone determine further doing. The stone is too heavy or too angular, not solid enough; or else the properties undergone show it is fit for the use for which it is intended. The process continues until a mutual adaptation of the self and the object emerges … What is true of this simple instance is true, as to form, of every experience. [The] interaction of the [live creature with its environment] … constitutes the total experience that is had, and the [mutual adaptation] which completes it is the institution of a felt harmony.
>
> DEWEY 1934b, 45

Dewey thus identifies the same formal structure of experienced unitive intimacy that inheres in the consummatory religious quality of experience evocatively described by Hudson, Emerson, and Wordsworth exhibited in a routine interaction between a human being and the non-human natural world. For here the live creature and the natural environment gradually achieve a harmonious integration via the process of mutual adaptation as each adapts to the other—the individual adapting her or his capacities, interests, and possibilities to the surrounding natural environment and vice versa. As Dewey writes, "adaptation … is quite as much adaptation *of* the environment to our own activities as our activities *to* the environment" (Dewey 1916, 46). To be sure, Dewey acknowledges that this religious re-integration is a delicate, complex, and open-ended process, as it is constantly subject to disturbances caused by the shifting needs, desires, and capacities of organisms and their environments (see Dewey 1934b, 13–14, 177, 267; Dewey 1938, 26–27). But this is exactly why he considers cultivating an attentiveness to "the actual religious quality of experience" to be so important: it helps us to successfully manage the enduring forms of contingency that are hallmarks of natural life in ways that are attentive to the vital co-dependence of humans and non-human nature; it produces a "better adjustment in life and its [natural] conditions" (Dewey 1934a, 14; also see Dewey 1934b, 23).[15]

15 Rogers' analysis of how Darwin's influence led Dewey to the realization that "contingency saturates the horizon from which inquiry functions" (Rogers 2008, 18) provides an intriguing albeit underdeveloped point of contact for understanding how the religious quality of experience evolves out of the ongoing natural transactions between self and world (also see Rogers 2008, 11–12, 16–18, 74–104).

In *A Common Faith*, Dewey uses the phrase "natural piety" to refer to this cultivated yet natural capacity of human beings to successfully and skillfully integrate with their natural environments given these enduring contingencies (Dewey 1934a, 25–26, 53).

> Natural piety … rest[s] 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.
>
> DEWEY 1934a, 25–26

Natural piety thus tends toward the cultivation of attitudes and practices that honor and preserve the underlying mutualistic-symbiotic integrity between human beings and the rest of the natural world, as it yields a reflective awareness that human beings—individually and collectively—are both fundamentally dependent upon the natural world as the source of all human possibilities and endeavors and responsible for its well-being. As Dewey writes, "natural piety" cultivates a sense of connection of human beings, "in the way of both dependence and support, with the enveloping world" (Dewey 1934a, 53) and promotes everyday practices that honor "the earth as the enduring home … of man … [as] the source of all man's food … [of] his continual shelter and protection, the raw material of all his activities" (Dewey 1990, 18–19).[16] In other words, natural piety recognizes that while our long-term individual and collective possibilities are "dependent upon the cooperation of nature," since nature "support[s] our undertakings and aspirations as much as it … defeats … us" (Dewey 1934a, 25), it remains the prerogative of humanity to harness the powers and resources of the natural world towards ends of ecological, individual, and social flourishing or degradation.[17]

16 That Dewey acknowledges the tangible effects that attentiveness (or lack thereof) to the religious quality has on the human and the non-human natural world indicates that Dewey's understanding of religiosity is not strictly an affective and subjectivized phenomena whose effects fail to translate into concrete effects and meaningful practice, as Douglas Anderson has suggested (Anderson 1993, 171).

17 Here I push back against Gale's assertion that Dewey's common faith is nothing but "a Promethean mysticism" wherein "unifications are achieved through man's active control of his [natural] environment" (Gale 2008, 111; also see 18–19). For Dewey explicitly acknowledges human dependence "upon forces beyond our control" (Dewey 1934a, 24) even while advocating for ecologically sound forms of human intervention in nature.

3 Bringing Dewey and Silko into Conversation

Together, Leslie Silko's novels, poems, and essays offer a rich account of the Laguna Pueblo people's "religious" practices and commitments concerning the human's relation to the natural world that is not only illuminated by but also concretizes, expands, and challenges the Deweyian reconstruction sketched above.

One of the most salient points of convergence emerges when we consider Silko's expression of the senses of alienation and connectedness that characterize the Laguna Pueblo relation to the natural environment. For example, in her essay "Landscape, History, and the Pueblo Imagination" Silko claims that "human identity is linked with all the elements of Creation … The land, the sky, all that is within them—the landscape—includes human beings" (Silko 1986b, 86). Again,

> Human consciousness remains *within* the hills, canyons, cliffs, and the plants, clouds, and sky … The human being [is not] somehow *outside* or *separate from* the territory … [They] are as much a part of the landscape as the boulders they stand on … There is no high mesa edge or mountain peak where one can stand and not immediately be part of all that surrounds.
>
> SILKO 1986b, 85

And for this reason, Silko concludes, "the landscape … takes on a deeper significance: the landscape resonates the spiritual … dimension of the Pueblo world even today" (Silko 1996, 36). And yet, Silko is sure to note that this embeddedness within the earth does not amount to a form of ineffable unitive immediacy that inhibits intelligible expression of this reality. For

> [t]he Laguna people made … a journey of awareness and imagination in which they emerged from being within the earth and from everything included in the earth to the culture and the people they became, differentiating themselves for the first time from all that had surrounded them … The journey was an interior process of the imagination, a growing awareness that being human is somehow different from all other life—animal, plant, and inanimate. Yet we are all from the same source: the awareness never deteriorated into Cartesian duality cutting off the human from the natural world.
>
> SILKO 1986b, 91–92

Silko thus acknowledges humanity's inextricable connection to and separation from the rest of the natural world, but, with Dewey and against much of the Western philosophical tradition, Silko is keen to emphasize that this separation does not ontologically reify the distinction between the human and the rest of the natural world but rather gives rise to the possibility for a higher, more thoughtful re-connection between them, one that simultaneously foregrounds humanity's common origination from, dependence on, and responsibility for the non-human natural world. But, at the same time, she also calls attention to the challenges that get in the way of realizing this relation of dependence and responsibility toward nature with her detailed accounts of the pervasive and deeply felt sense of alienation that attends her and her people's relation to their native natural landscape as well as the physio-spiritual-psychical emaciation that results from it. And yet, despite the trials of the Laguna Pueblo, Silko perseveres in the hope of a better future, drawing on the power of language not only to help mend this fractured relation but also to aesthetically communicate something of her own experience to her readers in a way that confronts them with the demands posed by their intimate and inextricable (if unacknowledged) relation of dependence and responsibility toward the rest of the natural world.

Here, then, we can already discern, in a preliminary way, several marked congruities between Dewey and Silko. First, both authors posit a fundamental continuity between human beings and the rest of the natural world while acknowledging that human beings are, in some sense, distinct from and responsible for everything else in nature. Second, they are both sensitive to the fundamental sense of alienation and disconnectedness that haunts the human's relation to the non-human natural world. Third, both authors turn to art—especially literary art—as a powerful vehicle expressing these dynamics of alienation and reconnection. And fourth, they both suggest that by sincerely engaging with certain literary works of art these experienced senses of alienation and reconnection can be aesthetically communicated between artist and reader in a way that has the potential to render readers responsive—in thought and action—to the pressing social and ecological issues they face in their own lives and communities.

There are also, however, some important and stark differences in how Dewey and Silko conceptualize religion. Particularly notable is that whereas Dewey is deeply suspicious of traditional forms of "religion" that are rigidly oriented toward the supernatural and instead urges us to attend to the unitive religious quality of experience inherent in our daily interactions with the rest of nature, Silko, as we will see, creatively deploys the full weight of her Laguna Pueblo and Diné religious heritage—in which the supernatural and the natural are

seen as inter-penetrating and inter-acting phenomena (see Silko 1977, 10–13, 49, 86–87, 93–94, 169–170)[18]—in a way that brings this religious quality of experience and its ecological significance forcefully before human awareness.[19] Silko's account of the ecological sensibility embedded within her "religious" traditions thus tempers Dewey's insistence on "freeing" the religious quality of experience from its "historic encumbrances."[20]

These themes of Silko's work are artfully weaved together in her critically acclaimed 1977 poetic novel, *Ceremony*, which tells the homecoming story of Tayo, a World War II veteran, who, throughout much of the novel, suffers from physical ailments and psycho-spiritual catastrophe caused, in large part, by the lasting grip of his white heritage. We learn that Tayo grew up on the Laguna Pueblo reservation but is of half-white parentage, making him both an insider and outsider within his own community. "I'm half-breed. I'll be the first to say it. I'll speak for both sides" (Silko 1977, 39). We also learn that Tayo not only fought in in the Pacific Islands during World War II—perceived by many in the Laguna community as a white man's war—but that he also witnessed his brother Rocky's gruesome execution while abroad, leaving him geographically and spiritually disconnected from his native natural and socio-cultural landscape. Tayo's bleak condition upon returning home lands him in a white-run VA hospital where he becomes like "white smoke .... fad[ing] into the white world of their bed sheets and walls" (Silko 1977, 13).

18 Many commentators have noted the function of the supernatural in *Ceremony*. Robert Bell, for example, argues that *Ceremony* draws heavily on "[t]he standard Native American myth pattern ... [that] provide[s] a hero or heroine who gets into a series of predicaments or suffer injuries (usually transformations in mind and body) that require supernatural aid" (Bell 2002, 23; also see 29–31). But Bell and others also highlight that Tayo's relation to the supernatural is such that the boundaries between natural and supernatural are blurred and indeed blurred in such a way that Tayo's relation to the supernatural imbues him with a sense of responsibility for the natural world and confidence in his natural ability to take steps to cultivate its well-being as well as his own healthy relation to it. (See Bell 2003, 26–27; Winsbro 1993, 81–83; Monk 2012, 177; Nelson 2008, 60–61).

19 For example, in his thorough study of the Pueblo and Navajo traditions and mythologies that animate Silko's novel, Robert Nelson discusses how Silko leverages the symbolic significance of the mythological figures Corn Woman and Reed Woman as motifs for the themes of separation and harmony between the life of the people and the life of the land (See Nelson 2008, 68–69, 104).

20 Indeed, Silko's account could be said to provide a provisional rebuttal to Dewey's claim that whether we are dealing with the religion "of the Sioux Indian or of Judaism or of Christianity ... the ideal factors in experience that may be called religious take on a load that is not inherent in them, a load of current beliefs and of institutional practices that are irrelevant to them" (Dewey 1934a, 8–9).

Old Betonie—a Navajo medicine man who serves as Tayo's spiritual guide and the facilitator of his ritual healing ceremony—gives us a clue as to why Tayo's immersion in white culture has reaped such catastrophic physical and psycho-spiritual consequences: white culture fails to recognize the presence of life—the very source(s) of human life—in the non-human natural world, seeing instead only "dead objects" (Silko 1977, 190; also see 114).

> Caves across the ocean
> in caves of dark hills
> white skin people …
> grow away from the earth …
> grow away from the sun …
> grow away from the plants and animals
> They see no life
> When they look
> They see only objects
> The world is a dead thing for them
> The trees and rivers are not alive
> The deer and the bear are objects
> They see no life.
>
> SILKO 1977, 125

Old Betonie's poem indicates that Tayo's physical and psycho-spiritual illnesses are linked to his immersion in a broader set of cultural practices, beliefs, attitudes, institutions, and commitments that treat the non-human natural world and its inhabitants as lifeless entities that are somehow fundamentally different than and disconnected from human beings.[21] Indeed, while in the hospital Tayo often breaks down crying at the thought of home because there everyone "[is] dead and everything is dying" (Silko 1977, 14). He even considers his own body to be "dry and dead, the carcass of a tiny rodent" (Silko 1977, 14), and, at times, thinks of himself as being "like a fence post" (Silko 1977, 23). Even Tayo's senses become dulled, as he sees only "outlines of gray steel tables, outlines of the food they pushed into his mouth, which was only an outline too, like all the

21 To be sure, Silko emphasizes that this "destructive impulse" does not "reside with a single group or race … it's not just one group of people, that's too simple" (Silko 2000, 36). Instead, she thinks the "destructive impulse" represents a kind of cosmic force that she often describes in the novel through a motif of cosmic "witchery" on the part of mythic "Destroyers," of which this white culture of death is but one example. (Silko 1977, 132–135, 178, 204).

outlines he saw … the days and seasons disappeared into a twilight at the corner of his eye … He inhabited a gray winter fog …" (Silko 1977, 13). Tayo's immersion in this white culture of death thus leaves him physically, psychically, and spiritually languishing, as he is unable to recognize the presence of life not only in the non-human natural landscape that physically sustains him and vitally informs his identity but also in himself and the people dearest to him.

Silko's account of Tayo's catastrophic state of being embodies key aspects of Dewey's account of the religious problem of human existence while simultaneously enriching it by lending it a degree of concreteness and range it sometimes seems to lack. For Tayo's catastrophic state of being and unfortunate proclivity for seeing only "dead objects" epitomizes Dewey's concerns about the gloomy temperament and inability to thrive that can result from internalizing the Western philosophical tradition's ontological reification of the methodological distinction between the human being and the non-human natural world. Silko's account, however, draws out the ecological implications of Tayo's internalization of the detached ethos of the dominant white culture in ways that are only latent in Dewey's philosophical analysis and critique of much of Western philosophy. For example, several times Silko gives us glimpses into Tayo's callousness toward animal life, describing how he "slapped at … insects mechanically" (Silko 1977, 7), "trampled the ants with his boots," (Silko 1977, 57), "kicked dirt over the seeds and pulp" (Silko 1977, 57), and "had not been able to endure the flies … they had enraged him. He had cursed their sticky feet and wet mouths, and when he could reach them he had smashed them between his hands" (Silko 1977, 94). Silko even intimates that, at times, Tayo's attitude rivals that of his friend Harvey's, who laughs at the vicious killing of thirty sheep and proclaims that animals are not "worth anything anyway" (Silko 1977, 21; also see Beidler 2002, 18–19). Silko's literary depiction of Tayo's callousness towards animal life thus helps us to see in concrete terms the ecological degradation that can result from the internalization of something akin to the ontological reification of the distinction between the human being and the non-human natural world that Dewey warns is all too common in the modern Western philosophical tradition and modern life and society (Dewey 1934b, 21, 237, 362).

Tayo's departure from the white-run hospital marks a turning point in the novel, as it affords him time to re-immerse himself in his Laguna Pueblo heritage, which, in turn, engenders a nascent awakening of self-consciousness that helps him to take stock of his burden and take steps towards healing his relationship with his native natural and socio-cultural landscape. "For a long time he had been white smoke. He did not realize that until he left the hospital, because white smoke had no consciousness of itself" (Silko 1977, 13). And with this re-immersion in his ancestral traditions and nascent awakening of self-

consciousness, Tayo gradually comes to once again notice, appreciate, and reconnect with the abundance of life that surrounds him. These transformations are particularly manifest in Tayo's changing attitude toward and treatment of animals. For example, upon leaving the cafe owned by the old Mexican man who decorated the walls with "a half dozen shiny yellow fly ribbons" and stays vigilantly armed with "a red rubber fly swatter," Tayo "open[s] the screen door only enough to squeeze out and clos[es] it quickly so that no flies got in" (Silko 1977, 93). Tayo's concern for the welfare of insects grows even stronger after a visit with old Betonie. As Tayo left, Silko writes, "He stepped carefully, pushing the toe of his boot into the weeds first to make sure the grasshoppers were gone before he set his foot down" (Silko 1977, 143). Indeed, this transformation of Tayo's attitude toward and treatment of insects is followed by an increasing awareness of the presence of animal life around him. "It was a world alive, always changing and moving" (Silko 1977, 95; also see 168). For instance, he hears "the buzzing of grasshopper wings," "the big bumblebees and the smaller bees sucking the blossoms," "the rustle of the swallows," and "a dove calling forth from the mouth of the canyon" (Silko 1977, 204–206; also see Beidler 2002, 20–21).

Tayo's change in attitude toward the animals coincides with his physical, psychical, and spiritual recovery, indicating that Tayo's healing is intimately linked with his reconnection with the rest of the natural world. Silko powerfully captures this concurrence when she writes, "He breathed deeply, and each breath had a distinct smell of snow from the north, of ponderosa pine on the rimrock above; finally he smelled the horses from the direction of the corral, and he smiled. Being alive was all right then: he had not breathed like that for a long time" (Silko 1977, 168). Here, then, Tayo shakes off the grey mist that dulled his senses in the hospital and numbed him to the presence of life in a way that literally and imaginatively bespeaks his ongoing reconnection with the natural sources of his existence. For his sense of smell is on the *qui vive* as he olfactically discerns the presence and general locations of many distinct forms of non-human life while simultaneously connecting with them in a deeply physical and spiritual manner by taking part of them literally into himself by breathing in the surrounding natural landscape.

Tayo's *imitation* of the animals, however, most forcefully symbolizes his consummatory religious reconnection with the non-human natural world. For example, at his family's ranch "[h]e … gathered yellow pollen gently with a small blue feather from Josiah's pouch; he imitated the gentleness of the bees as they brushed their sticky-haired feet and bellies softly against the flowers" (Silko 1977, 205; also see Beidler 2002, 21). But the spotted cattle are the animal that Tayo "comes most dramatically to imitate" (Beidler 2002, 21) and that best

symbolize the overarching narrative of his alienation from and reconnection with the non-human natural world. We learn that the cattle—interbred to survive harsh desert conditions—originally belonged to Tayo's uncle, Josiah, and that Tayo promised to take care of the them after Josiah's death. We are also told that the cattle are branded with a mark that "looked like a big butterfly with its wings outstretched, or two loops of rope tied together in the center" (Silko 1977, 74)—a symbol for infinity (Owens 2002, 106), a lack of limits, a continuum, that not only intimates the fundamental unitive intimacy that inheres between the animal and the natural world but also foreshadows Tayo's own religious reconnection with the non-human nature. Indeed, Silko often depicts these domesticated cattle as wild animals connected to nature, as they still trust their own instincts, running, hunting, and listening like the wild desert antelope (Silko 1977, 68–70). So even though the cattle have been to some extent extricated from the wild via domestication, they still enjoy the unitive intimacy characteristic of what Dewey calls "animal grace." In this way, the cattle symbolize Tayo's potential to re-establish a similarly intimate and unbound relation with the natural world even after having been alienated from it through his immersion in the predominant white culture.

The cattle, though, are stolen by Floyd Lee—a wealthy white rancher who is notorious for engaging in ecologically exploitative agricultural practices (Silko 1977, 189)—while Tayo is at war, further symbolizing Tayo's spiritual alienation from his natural and socio-cultural heritage. Subject to Floyd Lee's exploitative ranching methods, the cattle, like Tayo, fail to thrive (Silko 1977, 174–175).

> Cattle are like any living thing. If you separate them from the land for too long, keep them in barns and corrals, they lose something. The stomachs get to where they can only eat rolled oats and dry alfalfa. When you turn them loose again they go running all over. They are scared because the land is unfamiliar and they are lost.
>
> SILKO 1977, 68

Old Betonie understands that ancient Laguna Pueblo rituals can aid in reconnecting Tayo to his present natural and socio-cultural landscape and thereby help heal his physical illness and spiritual alienation. But he also understands that if traditional Laguna Pueblo ritual ceremonies are to function as more than mere lifeless relics then they must remain agile enough to help practitioners effectively respond to and resolve predicaments facing them in the here and now. Appropriately, then, a key aspect of Tayo's ritual healing ceremony takes the form of a quest to retrieve his uncle Josiah's stolen herd of hybrid Mexican cattle from Floyd Lee. By integrating Tayo's contemporary reality with a

set of practices and beliefs that have historically animated the Laguna people and their relation to the non-human natural world, old Betonie's prescribed ritual ceremony thus incorporates Dewey's Darwinian insights concerning the centrality of the "live organism's" ability to interact with the shifting conditions and contingencies presented by its natural environment in a way that promotes mutual growth and health. As old Betonie says to Tayo,

> At one time, the ceremonies as they had been performed were enough for the way the world was then. But after the white people came, elements in this world began to shift; and it became necessary to create new ceremonies. I have made changes in the rituals. The people mistrust this greatly, but only this growth keeps the ceremonies strong … things which don't shift and grow are dead things.
>
> SILKO 1977, 116

That old Betonie's prescribed ritual ceremony is intended to reconnect Tayo to his contemporary natural and social landscape suggests that, at the intratextual level, the ritual can be understood as a Deweyian work of art and old Betonie a Deweyian artist. For although Dewey is highly critical of rituals associated with historic religions in *Art as Experience* he claims that "rites and ceremonies" are powerful expressions of art that "wed man and nature" and "render … men aware of their union with one another in origin and destiny" (Dewey 1934b, 281). And old Betonie's prescribed ritual, as we will see, does precisely this—it helps transform Tayo's condition and his relation to his native natural and social landscape from one of isolation and despair to one of connectivity, familiarity, and hope by altering the concepts and practices through which his experiences are made possible and rendered intelligible. Viewed in this light, old Betonie's prescribed ritual ceremony adds a level of depth and concrete determinacy to Dewey's intriguing but underdeveloped claims regarding ritual as a form of art capable of engendering in the human being an experienced religious reconnection with the natural sources of human life.[22]

Old Betonie's prescribed ritual healing ceremony takes Tayo to Mount Taylor—the preeminent sacred Laguna mountain—and it is here that Tayo and the non-human natural world come to relate in a way that embodies

22 My Deweyian analysis of old Betonie and the ritual ceremony he prescribes Tayo is well-positioned to enter into conversation with influential and emerging debates in religious studies, philosophy, and anthropology concerning the role of ritual practice in reshaping our understanding of ourselves and the world around us. See, for example, Dreyfus 2017; Bush 2014; Bell 1992.

Dewey's conceptions of the consummatory religious quality of experience, mutual adaptation, and natural piety. Tayo's journey begins with an encounter with a mountain lion.

> The mountain lion came out from a grove of oak trees in the middle of the clearing … his motions were like the shimmering of tall grass in the wind. The eyes caught twin reflections of the moon; the glittering yellow light penetrated his chest and he inhaled suddenly. Relentless motion was the lion's greatest beauty, moving like mountain clouds with the wind, changing substance and color in rhythm with the contours of the mountain peaks: dark as lava rock, and suddenly as bright as a field of snow.
>
> SILKO 1977, 182

As one commentator aptly observes, Silko's description highlights the lack of "hesitation on [the lion's] part as he moves freely and confidently in "rhythm" or harmony with his world" (Purdy 2002, 68). Seamlessly integrated into its natural environment, the mountain lion thus exhibits the "animal grace" that so intrigues Dewey and foreshadows Tayo's consummatory reconnection with his natural environment.

Tayo's initial encounter with the mountain lion prompts him to spread ritual pollen in the mountain lion's footprints, whispering "mountain lion, the hunter. Mountain lion, the hunter's helper" (Silko 1977, 182). But shortly after conducting the ceremony, Tayo is captured and detained by the employees of Floyd Lee. Yet he and cattle are able to escape when the ranchers become distracted by the lion's tracks and leave to hunt down the animal. And as Tayo and the cattle furtively embark on their escape, a heavy snow fall begins to cover the ground, "swirling in tall chimneys of wind, filling [their] tracks like pollen sprinkled in the mountain lion's footprints" (Silko 1977, 191).

> The snow was covering everything, burying the mountain lion's tracks and obliterating his scent. The white men and their lion hounds could never track the lion now. He walked with the wind at his back. It would cover all signs of the cattle too; the wet flakes would cling to the fence wire and freeze into a white crust; and the wire he had cut away and the gaping hole in the fence would be lost in the whiteout, hidden in snow on snow.
>
> SILKO 1977, 191

Tayo's ordeal on the mountain imaginatively illustrates the mutualistic-symbiotic relation that is possible between the human and the non-human natu-

ral world. In Deweyian terms, Tayo's ordeal exhibits the kind of delicate and complex co-dependency and co-agency that is characteristic of mutual adaptation and natural piety. For just as the mountain lion and the snow protect and care for Tayo and the cattle (not to mention the snow's protection of the mountain lion), Tayo protects the mountain lion (with his ritual blessing) and helps rescue the cattle from the exploitative agriculture practices of Floyd Lee and his ranchers. That Tayo's fate is interwoven with natural forces beyond his control—the presence of the mountain lion and the heavy snow—indicates not only that dependence and gratitude are essential aspects of his relationship with the natural world but also that nature possesses its own distinctive sense of agency, in the sense that it is Tayo's loving gestures toward the non-human natural world that prompts nature's loving response rather than simply luck, chance, or a divine fiat. At the same time, Tayo's successful rescue of the cattle bespeaks his own empowered sense of agency and responsibility to care for the non-human natural world. Tayo's completion of the ceremonial ritual thus instills in him a practical understanding that "survival depend[s] upon harmony and cooperation not only among human beings, but among all things—the animate and the less animate" (Silko 1996, 29). Or to put the point in Deweyian terms, Tayo came away with a keener "sense of the permanent and inevitable implication of nature and man in a common career and destiny" (Dewey 1977a, 176).

As Tayo descends the mountain, the snow fall thickens and he is forced to take shelter in the wild, and here Silko again powerfully depicts Tayo's ongoing reconnection with the natural world.

> He lay in a shallow depression and heaped piles of dry leaves over himself until he felt warm again … The smell of the snow had a cold damp edge, and a clarity that summer rain never had. The scent touched him deep behind his belly, and he could feel the old anticipation stirring as it had when he was a child waiting for the first snowflakes to fall.
>
> SILKO 1977, 189

Once more the natural environment comes to Tayo's aid, as the earth literally warms him within its embrace while the scent of the snow traverses his senses, reaching deep within him in a manner that bespeaks his ongoing reconnection with the natural sources of his existence.

As Tayo finally reaches the base of the mountain and emerges from the storm, Silko offers a rich description of his vivified state upon completing this part of his ritual ceremony that forcefully expresses yet another instance of his ongoing reconnection with the natural environment.

> [Tayo] shook his head the way the deer shook snow away and yelled out "ahooouuuh!" Then he ran across the last wide flat to the plateau rim. The snow packed under his feet with a hollow sound … He pulled a piñon cone from the snowy branches and shook the fat brown piñon into his hand. He ate them as he walked, cracking the shells one by one, working the nut meat loose with his tongue.
>
> SILKO 1977, 191

This specific instance of Tayo's imitation of the animals—his temporary and partial occupancy of the animal's mode of being-in-the-world—should remind us of Dewey's appeal to animal grace and its symbolization and phenomenological approximation of the religious quality of experience as well as Hudson's and Emerson's aforementioned poetic recollections of the sense of animal-like exhilaration that pervades their childhood interactions with the natural environment. For in these moments, Tayo was fully present, all there, in all of his actions, overcoming the boundaries between self and the world as he seamlessly integrates himself into his natural environment. As Silko writes, "He had … seen and heard the world as it always was: no boundaries, only transitions" (Silko 1977, 229).

And yet, Tayo's experience (and, of course, Silko's representation of it) is shot through with mediation, as it is his active and conscious participation in his culture's rituals, concepts, beliefs, et al. that enables him to properly reconnect with the non-human natural world. Thus, like Dewey's consummatory religious experience, Tayo's experience blends elements of sensuous immediacy with forms of mediation and reflection to yield a relation of unitive intimacy with the non-human natural environment. And, Silko, like Dewey, utilizes the figure of the child to symbolically convey this convergence of the immediate and the mediate in Tayo's consummatory imitation of the animals.

> But old Grandma always used to say, "Back in time immemorial, things were different, the animals could talk to human beings and many magical things still happened." [Tayo] never lost the feeling he had in his chest when she spoke these words … and he still felt it was true, despite all they had taught him in school—that long, long ago things *had* been different, and human beings could understand what the animals said.
>
> SILKO 1977, 87

Tayo's recollection of his childhood intimations of a deep-seated connection between humans and animals indicates that he continues to carry within himself the child's ability to enter into an intimate relation with the animals and

the animal mode of being-in-the-world, even into adult age. To be sure, Tayo's recovery of this intimate relation with the non-human natural world is an arduous, ongoing, and uncertain task. But his dramatic imitation of the animals at the conclusion of his ordeal on Mount Taylor renders immediately present and viscerally palpable these powerful emotions, intimations, and connections experienced during childhood such that he once again comes to feel properly alive and integrated with the surrounding natural world. "Step by step the medicine man [thus] brought the child back" (Silko 1977, 120).[23]

Tayo's mature recognition of the underlying connectedness of human beings and the non-human natural world and his cultivation of natural piety affords him the confidence to reintegrate into his home community and brings about a radical transformation in his practical everyday dealings and encounters with his native natural and social landscape, as he once again experiences the "the comfort of belonging with the land … the peace of being with these hills" (Silko 1977, 108, also see 168, 200–202, 235–236). Tayo's transformation thus concretizes Dewey's claim that the religious quality of experience yields a better adjustment in life and its conditions as well as a sense of security, stability, and peace that reaches to the depths of one's being. And furthermore, that Tayo begins to recognize "the pattern of the ceremony" all around him in the natural and social world provides a powerful illustration of Dewey's claims that the religious quality of experience is embedded in many of the most seemingly mundane interactions with our natural and social environments (Silko 1977, 228–229, 236–237). As Silko writes, "He cried at the relief he felt at finally seeing the pattern …. He was not crazy; he had never been crazy. He had only seen and heard the world as it always was: no boundaries, only transitions through all distances and time" (Silko 1977, 229).

In closing, I want to suggest that we can understand *Ceremony* as a Deweyian work of art and Silko as a Deweyian artist in ways that add further degrees of range, depth, and determinacy to Dewey's philosophical theory about literary art's capacity to resolve problems by aesthetically communicating to the audience a phenomenological approximation of the artist's own experience of grappling with and resolving a problem in the production of the artwork. In the preface to *Ceremony*, Silko describes how writing the novel was her way of coping with and healing her homesickness, severe depression, and physical ailments while living away from home in Alaska (Silko, 1977, xi–xix; also see Chavkin & Chavkin 2007, 26). As Silko writes,

23 Fitz (Fitz 2004, 46–47) and Winsbro (Winsbro 1993, 85–86) have also noted Silko's thematic focus on the importance of a certain recovery of childhood for Tayo's healing.

> [A]s the main character, Tayo, began to recover from his illness, I too begin to feel better, and had fewer headache … The novel was my refuge my magic vehicle back to the Southwest land of sandstone mesas, blue sky, and sun … I remade the place in words … I was home, from time immemorial, as the old ones likes to say to us children long ago.
>
> SILKO 1977, XV

The creation of *Ceremony* thus acted for Silko as a way of grappling with and resolving a deep problem pertaining to her alienated relation to her native natural and social landscape. For by telling "a story [that one can] feel happening" (Silko 1977, 173), "[a] story that … [one] becomes [in] being told" (Silko 1977, 229), she is able to effectively "remake … the Laguna country" (Silko 1986a, 27–28) and "affect the old, old, old, way of looking at the world" (Silko 2000, 19) wherein humans have a more symbiotic relation with the rest of the natural world. Viewed through the lens of Dewey's theory of art, *Ceremony* becomes an opportunity for sincere readers to aesthetically participate in Silko's anguish and joy in ways that help them grapple with their own individualized senses of alienation and desires to reconnect with the common natural sources of life.[24] Indeed, as one commentator writes, Silko's novel "commands especially active readers—participants in the crisis as well as in the "ceremony" of reclamation—whose ultimate role is to change our way of living in the world by recognizing and transforming our linguistic relationship to it" (Rainwater 2002, 119; also see Moss 1993, 3–4). As we have seen, this kind of transformation in living via the transformative power of the artist's speech is precisely the promise and power that Dewey sees in art and aesthetic communication. And yet, another commentator sounds a word of caution, claiming that "it is one thing to assert the participatory dimension of a narrative, [while] it is another declare the reader successfully accomplishes this participation" (Eppert 2004, 736), especially when vast and perhaps even incommensurable cultural, philosophical, and theological divides separate artist from audience. How, in such circumstances, might readers "become answerable to the address of this literary genre and the historical events it indexes? How might readers responsibly, and responsively, read, participate in, and learn from Tayo's ceremony?" (Eppert 2004, 736). Dewey's theory of art suggests that a genuinely aesthetic appreciation of *Ceremony* requires concurrently negotiating

24 Claudia Eppert provides a thorough overview of different contemporary versions of this experiential engagement approach to reading *Ceremony*, helpfully marking their insights and limitations. Quite intriguingly, although briefly, Eppert traces this approach to the progressive aims of Dewey (See Eppert 2004, 739–740, 749–750).

between empathetic participation in Silko's experiences (a task which itself requires learning more about the past and present history, events, practices, discourses, and dynamics that comprise Silko's Laguna Pueblo and Diné heritage), deference to the irreducible uniqueness of her experiences, and imaginative redeployment of them in ways that are applicable to the events, places, problems, and traditions that are unique to readers' own lives and communities, indicating that while old Betonie's prescribed ritual ceremony has been tailored to fit Tayo's particular circumstances, it has lessons to teach those who wish to sincerely grapple with the social and ecological issues raised by the text.

References

Anderson, Douglas. 1993. "Smith and Dewey on the Religious Dimension of Experience: Dealing with Dewey's Half-God." *American Journal of Theology & Philosophy* 12.2:161–176.

Beidler, Peter. 2002. "Animals and Theme in *Ceremony*." In *Leslie Marmon Silko's Ceremony: A Casebook*, edited by Allan Chavkin. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 17–23

Bell, Catherine. 1992. *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Bell, Robert. 2002. "Circular Design in *Ceremony*." In *Leslie Marmon Silko's Ceremony: A Casebook*, edited by Allan Chavkin. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 23–41.

Bush, Stephen. 2014. *Visions of Religion: Experience, Meaning, and Power*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Caracciolo, Marco. 2015. "Changed by Literature? A Critical Review of Psychological Research on the Effects of Reading Fiction." *Interdisciplinary Literary Studies* 17.4:517–539.

Chavkin, Allan. 2007. "The Origins of Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*." *The Yale University Library Gazette* 82.1/2:23–30.

Chavkin, Nancy. 2007. "The Origins of Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*." *The Yale University Library Gazette* 82.1/2:23–30.

Christion, Tim. 2016. "Ecofeminism, Ecophenomenology, and the Metaphorics of Nature's Agency." In *Nature and Experience: Phenomenology and the Environment*, edited by Bryan Bannon. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, pp. 97–113.

Dewey, John. 1910. *How We Think*. New York: Dover Publications.

Dewey, John. 1916. *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education*. New York: Macmillan Press.

Dewey, John. 1920. *Reconstruction in Philosophy*. New York: Henry Holt.

Dewey, John. 1925. *Experience and Nature*. Chicago: Open Court Publishing.

Dewey, John. 1929. *The Quest for Certainty: A Study of the Relation of Knowledge and Action*. New York: Minton-Balch.

Dewey, John. 1934a. *A Common Faith*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Dewey, John. 1934b. *Art as Experience*. New York: Berkley Publishing.

Dewey, John. 1938. *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*. New York: Henry Holt and Company.

Dewey, John. 1960. "From Absolutism to Experimentalism." In *On Experience, Nature, and Freedom*, edited by Richard J. Bernstein. New York: Liberal Arts Press.

Dewey, John. 1967. *The Early Works: Volume 2, 1887*, edited by Jo Ann Boydston. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.

Dewey, John. 1969. *The Early Works: Volume 3, 1889–1892*, edited by Jo Ann Boydston. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.

Dewey, John. 1977a. *The Middle Works of John Dewey: Volume 4*, 1907–1909, edited by Jo Ann Boydston. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.

Dewey, John. 1977b. *The Poems of John Dewey*, edited by Jo Ann Boydston. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.

Dewey, John. 1990. *The School and Society and the Child and the Curriculum*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Dreyfus, Hubert. 2017. *Background Practices: Essays on the Understanding of Being*, edited by Mark A. Wrathall. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Emerson, Ralph. 1983. *Essays and Lectures*. New York: Library of America.

Eppert, Claudia. 2004. "Leslie Silko's *Ceremony*: Rhetorics of Ethical Reading and Composition." *JAC* 24.2, Special Issue, Part 2: Trauma and Rhetoric: 727–754.

Fitz, Brewster. 2004. *Silko: Writing Storyteller and Medicine Woman*. Norman, OK: The University of Oklahoma Press.

Fesmire, Steven. 2004. "Dewey and Animal Ethics." In *Animal Pragmatism: Rethinking Human-Nonhuman Relationships*, edited by Erin McKenna and Andrew Light. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, pp. 43–63.

Gale, Richard. 2008. *John Dewey's Quest for Unity: The Journey of a Promethean Mystic*. New York: Prometheus Books.

Haskins, Casey. 1992. "Dewey's "Art as Experience": The Tension Between Aesthetics and Aestheticism." *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 28.2: 217–259.

Hoyt, Sarah. 1912. "The Etymology of Religion." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 32.2: 126–129.

Larson, Sidern. 1997. "Pragmatism and American Indian Thought." *Studies in American Indian Literatures*, 9.2 (1997).

MacDonald, Hugh. 2004. *John Dewey and Environmental Philosophy*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Monk, Nicholas. 2012. "Versions of the *Seeleroman*: Cormac McCarthy and Leslie Silko." In *Intertextual and Interdisciplinary Approaches to Cormac McCarthy: Borders and Crossings*. New York, NY: Routledge Press, pp. 168–184.

Moss, Maria. 1993. *We've Been Here Before: Women in Creation Myths and Contemporary Literature of the Native American Southwest*. Hamburg: Lit Verlag.

Nelson, Robert. 2008. *Leslie Marmon Silko's Ceremony: The Recovery of Tradition*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing.

Owens, Louis. 2002. "The Very Essence of Our Lines: Leslie Silko's Webs of Identity." In *Leslie Marmon Silko's Ceremony: A Casebook*, edited by Allan Chavkin. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 91–117.

Plumwood, Val. 2006. "The Concept of a Cultural Landscape: Nature, Culture, and Agency in the Land." *Ethics and the Environment*, 11.2 (2006).

Pratt, Scott. 2002. *Native Pragmatism: Rethinking the Roots of American Philosophy*. Bloomington, Indiana.: Indiana University Press.

Purdy, John. 2002. "The Transformation: Tayo's Genealogy in *Ceremony*." In *Leslie Marmon Silko's Ceremony: A Casebook*, edited by Allan Chavkin. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 63–71.

Rainwater, Catherine. 2002. "The Semiotics of Dwelling in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*." In *Leslie Marmon Silko's Ceremony: A Casebook*, edited by Allan Chavkin. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 117–139.

Rockefeller, Steven. 1991. *John Dewey, Religious Faith and Democratic Humanism*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Rogers, Melvin. 2009. *The Undiscovered Dewey; Religion, Morality, and the Ethos of Democracy*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Silko, Leslie. 1977. *Ceremony*. New York: Penguin Books

Silko, Leslie. 1986a. *The Delicacy and the Strength of Lace: Letters Between Leslie Marmon Silko and James Wright*. Minneapolis: Graywolf Press.

Silko, Leslie. 1986b. "Landscape, History, and the Pueblo Imagination." *Antaeus* 57 (autumn 1986): 83–94.

Silko, Leslie. 1996. "Interior and Exterior Landscapes: The Pueblo Migration Stories." In *Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit: Essays on Native American Life Today*. New York: Touchstone.

Silko, Leslie. 2000. *Conversations with Leslie Marmon Silko*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.

Wilshire, Bruce. 2000. *The Primal Roots of American Philosophy: Pragmatism, Phenomenology, and Native American Thought*. University Park, PA.: The Pennsylvania State University Press.

Winsbro, Bonnie. 1993. *Supernatural Forces: Belief, Difference, and Power in Contemporary Works by Ethnic Women*. Amherst, MA: The University of Massachusetts Press.

Wordsworth, William. 2000. "The Prelude." In *Major Works*. Oxford: Oxford World Classics.