

# On Philip Kitcher's *The Main Enterprise of the World: Rethinking Education*

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## ABSTRACT

This is a long review of a long book, the longest to my knowledge on what educational aims and the curriculum that flows from them should be. The first half of the review is devoted to a brief summary of each of the eleven chapters. The second half raises some critical points. These cover remarks about R.S. Peters' alleged traditionalism; the salience of climate change considerations among educational aims; the claim that the arts, like the sciences, make progress; seeing the elements of morality as a toolbox. The longest critical discussion is about Kitcher's notion of human fulfillment and whether he is right in his view that we should see it in terms of a successful life-plan aimed at furthering 'the human project'.

**KEYWORDS:** education, philosophy of education, aims of education, school curriculum, John Dewey

At 416 pages, Philip Kitcher's recent book, *The Main Enterprise of the World: Rethinking Education* (2021), is literally and metaphorically a heavyweight among texts in the philosophy of education. Kitcher is John Dewey Professor of Philosophy, Emeritus, at Columbia University in New York. He has written books on the philosophy of mathematics, the philosophy of science, ethics and pragmatism, as well as on Wagner, Joyce, and Mann. Both his university title and his wide range of interests are relevant to the theme of this book.

Kitcher is Deweyan in his pragmatist approach to philosophy in general and to education in particular. He follows Dewey in the latter's claim in *Democracy and Education* that:

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If we are willing to conceive education as the process of forming fundamental dispositions, intellectual and emotional, towards nature and fellow men, philosophy may even be defined as the general theory of education. (Dewey 1916: 383)

In line with this, he does not share the low opinion that many ‘pure’ philosophers have had about our subject. Indeed, not least through this work, he has himself become a distinguished contributor to it. As we shall see, his Deweyan standpoint—in his critical stance towards curriculum content and his emphasis on social reform, community, deliberative democracy, and a pragmatic concern for gradual improvement in human well-being—is central to his argument. He also brings to bear on this a polymathic immersion in many fields across the arts, sciences, and humanities relevant to thinking fundamentally about what a good education should be.

As its subtitle indicates, this last is what this book is about. Its main title, taken from Emerson, adds to this not only that striving to create a good system of education is of paramount importance, but also that it is so for humanity as a whole.

Kitcher systematically makes out his case for this conclusion in the eleven chapters of the book. The first six, taking up over half the text, are about what the aims of education should be. The next three describe the three central components of the curriculum that flow from these aims. Running through nearly all the nine chapters are specific proposals for educational reform, 34 in total, and presented for the most part as experimental guides to try out and adapt. Chapter 10 outlines how the vision of a society emerging from these earlier chapters would be different from the ones with which we are familiar, and the final chapter asks how far what has been said up to this point reflects utopian thinking or is practically realizable.

In engaging in any enterprise, we rightly take it as read that what we want to achieve should be our first consideration and only then should we decide what routes to follow so as to meet this end. I come from a country whose official thinking about school education appears to have turned this truism on its head. England’s national curriculum prescribes in great detail what must be included in the largely traditional subjects that compose it, but prefaces this by the sparsest of statements about its overall aims:

The national curriculum provides pupils with an introduction to the essential knowledge they need to be educated citizens. It introduces pupils to the best that has been thought and said, and helps engender an appreciation of human creativity and achievement. (DfE 2014: 3.1)

Forty words! And words that say very little that can be pinned down—apart from the unsubstantiated and controversial suggestion that knowledge-transmission should be at the heart of schooling. Compare this with Kitcher’s 201 closely printed and closely argued pages on what educational aims should be...

All may not be quite what it seems on the English policy scene. There may be *other* aims behind the national curriculum than its publicly stated ones, aims that do indeed come first and to further which the curriculum is indeed an effective means. In his Chapter 2, Kitcher decries ‘the idea that education ought to be shaped to the demands of the workplace’ (Kitcher 2021: 51). The English national curriculum shows every mark of having been fashioned with this aim in mind. Kitcher’s

critique of this economic conception of education helps us, as no doubt others, to see our own system for what it is. It is a critique that recurs through his book and to which his many pages on educational aims provide an answer.

Let us look more systematically at these pages. His six chapters on aims are in turn about (1) what Kitcher calls ‘overload’, (2) vocational aims, (3) fulfilment, (4) citizenship, (5) moral development, (6) religious aims.

Chapter 1 sets the scene for the chapters that follow. The problem of overload is that there has long been a multiplicity of possible aims, all of which have been championed by different parties as the key to educational reform. This has often resulted in the USA in oscillations in educational policy from one aim to another. What is needed, and what the philosophy of education can help to provide, is a ‘synthetic stocktaking’ of educational ideals in all their entangled interconnections. This is to be against the broad background of human development since the earliest times and its purpose is to further human progress—not with utopia in mind but with gradual improvement: what Kitcher calls ‘Deweyan meliorism’.

Having critiqued the idea originating with Adam Smith, and still very much with us, that the sole purpose of education should be to meet the demands of the economy, in Chapter 2 Kitcher looks at the coming decline in the amount of work available given developments in artificial intelligence and robotics. This is likely to leave us mainly with service industries, with more people moving into care of the elderly, health, and education. The last-mentioned provides an opportunity for class sizes to be radically reduced, for non-teachers including parents to work in the classroom, this interaction with adults who are adept in different areas helping children to become drawn into activities that especially appeal to them.

Chapter 3 is about fulfilment as an educational aim. Via a critical review of a range of positions on this—including objective list approaches, hedonism, religious notions, and liberal perspectives like Mill’s that lay especially heavy stress on personal autonomy—Kitcher turns to his own account. This understands individual fulfilment not as atomic, as with Mill, but as enmeshed in social involvement. He sees it in terms of human fulfilment on a broad historical scale, against the broad background of gradual human progress mentioned above. He writes:

According to my Deweyan perspective, the fulfilled life is one in which a person freely chooses and pursues a project, a life plan, intended to contribute to other human lives, one that succeeds in adding its own increment of value to the vast human project. (Kitcher 2021: 83)

Citizenship as an aim, discussed in Chapter 4, is about preparation for living in a democracy—not just the sort we have now with periodic free elections etc., or the Millian version of this with an informed electorate, but deliberative democracy on Deweyan lines, with fully informed people discussing common issues together and trying to reach consensus in families, small and larger communities. Suggestions for experimental educational reform include children learning to plan projects together from an early age. These involve increasing diversity in such groups the older they get, as well as studies of differences in human cultures complemented by extended visits to quite different cultures at home and abroad.

Adults are encouraged to take funded sabbaticals in which they live, plan, and work with strangers.

This brings Kitcher in Chapter 5 to tackle the closely connected topic of moral education. It goes beyond adherence to a moral code, but neither religion nor philosophy are unproblematic guides at this point. Complete philosophical systems like utilitarianism and Kantianism, as well as particularism and intuitionist views all have limitations. The solution is to take codes, elements of systems, religious stories, and other approaches to morality as elements in a toolbox to be drawn on as appropriate. This is best seen, once again, in the light of human development and moral improvements made throughout our history, as people learn to listen to each other and see everyday and larger-scale predicaments from different angles. The abolition of slavery, and growing opportunities for women are recent examples of the latter; the evolution of ideals of the self goes back further. As for suggestions for reform, in elementary education students role-play moral mistakes, such as blind adherence to habits, and are later acquainted with aspects of the history of moral life as just described. From adolescence on, people should have opportunities to form groups diverse in background to discuss moral issues in their lives.

The next chapter, six, is on religious education. Religion, too, is seen against a historical background, with ecumenical religion, which recognizes that different groups have different gods, emerging from its more primitive tribal form. A more advanced form of ecumenical religion recognizes that religion is independent of morality and tolerates secular perspectives. This becomes more refined once it involves intimations of a transcendent reality in a way that goes beyond the literal. It is suggested that from childhood on, through teacher input and discussion, students should learn why the two earlier forms of religion are incompatible with the educational aims of democratic citizenship and moral education, as well as how the later forms can be valuable in enriching human experience. Private schools based on particular religions must adhere to these desiderata.

So much for Kitcher's views on an array of interconnected educational aims. As we have seen, his discussion often includes experimental guides to how these aims can be embodied in more specific curricular recommendations. In Chapters 7, 8, and 9 he examines curricular issues more directly, in the natural sciences, the arts, and in understanding ourselves. He relates his accounts of these to the three central aims of self-maintenance, citizenship/moral agency, and personal fulfilment.

Echoing his reservations in Chapter 5 about complete philosophical systems, Kitcher rejects the idea of natural science as progressing towards a complete, unified system. Science progresses by searching for answers to questions seen as important, practically and theoretically. It is embedded in society in different ways: (1) some people are specialized investigators; (2) others, like doctors and electricians, are users of the products of science and technology; (3) while others still are fascinated by discoveries of their age. The STEM approach to science teaching in schools treats all three groups as if they were the first, with tedium for many often the result. Kitcher's pragmatic suggestions for elementary schools include introducing students to areas of science that they find especially fascinating, and involving them

in small groups working on finding solutions to everyday practical problems. In secondary school there is a general science course for groups (2) and (3), taken in an accelerated course by group (1). In different areas, this includes historically based modules leading to the present state of the field covering central concepts and the use of evidence. Other modules include probabilistic and other forms of reasoning and the social structure of scientific communities. Those in group (1) also have an intensive specialized introduction to areas they wish to explore. All secondary classes are small and involve the possibility of group projects.

In Chapter 8, Kitcher discusses education in the arts, including non-élite arts. He sees the arts as contributing to the human project, and questions the common belief that, unlike the sciences, they do not make progress. They have various educational benefits—generating valuable aesthetic experiences, unsettling attitudes, educating the emotions and moral sentiments, opening up career possibilities. Elementary children, Kitcher suggests, should be introduced to alternatives in a wide variety of artistic experiences, both creative and appreciative. Their interests should be recorded, so that a personal profile emerges, offering opportunities for deeper exploration of areas, styles, etc. that they find attractive, as well as for sharing their enthusiasms with others in their age group. At all stages creative and appreciative activities are brought into everyday tasks and the world beyond school. Adults are encouraged to develop their aesthetic interests further, partly in community centres devoted to the arts and democratic discussion about aesthetic aspects of the local environment.

The last chapter on a curriculum in line with educational aims is about understanding ourselves and others. Often in an interdisciplinary way, what is suggested draws on a range of studies, including world and national history, as well as geography that focuses on different conditions of life across the world. For secondary students, some economics, sociology, and psychology are also incorporated, with philosophical reflection added in the last year or so. In combination with all these, literature and film also have a role, not least as vehicles for discussion. A Deweyan approach to deliberative democracy is to the fore, highlighting empathy, community, and the provisional nature of social science conclusions. Throughout, the overemphasis of conventional schooling on transmitting knowledge is corrected in favour of such things as absorbing activities, working and deliberating together, role-play, learning from outsiders' experience. Many of the themes found in this paragraph are developed in the last five of Kitcher's thirty-four tentative proposals for educational reform. These also recommend that children begin to study a foreign language of their choice before the age of ten, again with interactions with others, here native speakers of the language, very much in mind.

Chapter 10 outlines how the kinds of society adumbrated in earlier chapters would be different from those with which we are familiar. There would be much more money for education—higher salaries for the increased number of teachers and helpers, money for poor families, building repairs, teacher education. Children would be brought up to value all forms of useful work, seeing the worthlessness of production for conspicuous consumption. Assessment would no longer

sort people out into a hierarchy of work roles, its purpose being to provide information about learners in order to guide their further development. There would be an array of adults working in a school, socially and ethnically diverse, and frequently changing in composition. The society would seek to eradicate racial and other stereotyping, as well as status hierarchies based on occupation. Incomes would become more equal, all educational institutions from pre-school to adult education would be free, and workers would be encouraged to take periodic leaves and allowed to work shorter weeks. A thirty- rather than a forty-hour week would in time become standard.

Is all this utopian thinking? The final chapter looks at problems with such a Deweyan vision. Limiting production is vulnerable to population growth in different societies, to justifiable consumer appetite for new goods and services, and to a combination of both. Even if—and this would not be easy—there were controls on reproduction and higher charges for new products, it would be hard to isolate one's own society from others where both kinds of growth were unchecked. Kitcher suggests possible answers like moves towards economic self-sufficiency, a focus on producing high-class goods in demand elsewhere, trading with other Deweyan societies. Even so, can enough resources be produced at a pan-human level, e.g. by taxing the rich, saving on luxury goods and military expenditure? The charge of utopianism is still unanswered. We have, as it were, to look for glimmers of light in a dark wood that help us to try this way and that, Dewey-fashion, to extricate ourselves and get closer to our goal.

In the comments on *The Main Enterprise of the World* on the back cover of the book, Martha Nussbaum describes it as 'a towering achievement, worthy of a place beside the classic works of John Dewey, J. S. Mill, and Rabindranath Tagore'. From one of the foremost American philosophers this is praise indeed. Is it justified?

Kitcher's deep acquaintance with multiple fields of thought illuminates his argument throughout. The Deweyan approach—shown in an attachment to feasible improvements rather than ideal solutions, a suspicion of systems built around completeness, an emphasis on social cooperation, inclusiveness, equality of respect, and democratic deliberation in small-scale communities—pervades the whole book, as does the humanity, humour, and passion with which Kitcher builds up his case in area after area. He leaves us with what is in many ways an attractive vision of what an education could and, in his eyes, should be like—an education poles apart from the economy-orientated schooling with which we have become familiar on both sides of the Atlantic. It is a long book, the longest I think I have read in philosophy of education. As it is written in a discursive style and is repetitive and familiar in places, it could well be shortened. This apart, the account of a worthwhile education that Kitcher gradually builds up keeps the reader absorbed throughout. This is helped not only by the author's deep commitment to his project and the care he takes in marshalling his arguments, but also by personal references and trenchant critical comments about the political and educational *status quo*.

The unusual chronological standpoint of the book adds to its impact. The central focus is on what education should be like today, but this is seen, again and again,

against the background of history, sometimes, as with Kitcher's references to Adam Smith, John Stuart Mill, and slavery in America, going back no more than a few centuries, but also, and more significantly, returning to the beginnings of human communities as far as prehistoric times.

This said, much of the larger framework of Kitcher's argument is found in other recent philosophical writings on education. This is especially true of Part One, on aims. Others have made much of the need to base the school curriculum on a defensible set of aims in such a way that curricular aims are specifications of more general ones. Common sense though this may seem, it is not what one finds in the educational systems of countries like England or the USA where economy-orientated aims are often tacitly assumed from the start.

In addition, Kitcher's general aims, mainly to do, in his words (2001: 232) with 'self-maintenance, citizenship and moral agency, and personal fulfilment' are familiar from texts by well-known US philosophers such as Harry Brighouse, Meira Levinson, and Martha Nussbaum.<sup>1</sup> But although Kitcher's treatment of these topics overlaps with others' accounts, the originality of his own version comes out both in his Deweyan approach, and in the wealth of detail on historical, political, and scholarly matters with which he enriches his account.

One of his detailed points that caught my eye is his comment (pp. 220–23), in his discussion of religious aims in Chapter 6, on Rawls' 'overlapping consensus' in *Political Liberalism* (1993). He differs from Rawls on who can be said to hold a reasonable comprehensive doctrine and thus legitimately take part in this consensus. Rawls seems to permit religious views epistemically grounded solely on scriptures and traditional teachings, while Kitcher sees these as unreasonable since they are not subject to the further scrutiny of moral enquiry.

I turn to some specific problems I have with claims Kitcher makes in the book. A minor, if surprising, one is what he says about R. S. Peters (pp. 229–30). He brackets him with Michael Oakeshott as a traditionalist on social, including educational, arrangements. This is very far from the case. At the centre of Peters' thinking about these matters was that claims made stand in need of justification by reference to high-level ethical principles. This includes his view that education is initiation into intrinsically worthwhile activities (Peters 1966: ch. 5). Peters' view of Oakeshott is found in the six-page critique of Oakeshott's traditionalism in politics that Peters contributed to *Social Principles and the Democratic State*, co-written with Stanley Benn (Benn and Peters 1959: 312, 318).

Another area of dissension is over climate change. Kitcher says a little about this, concerning fake news and more generally the consequences of climate change for human beings. I would give this greater priority, not only within the school curriculum but even among its overarching aims. In this I have been influenced by Wiggins' (2011) view of climate change as a threat not only to human existence, but also to that of all other living organisms and even the physical make-up of

<sup>1</sup> See Brighouse (2006); Levinson <https://podtail.com/podcast/philosophy-bites/meira-levinson-on-the-aims-of-education/>; Nussbaum <https://www.abc.net.au/religion/martha-nussbaum-education-for-democracy/11191430>.



the earth itself. Given that aims to do with work, personal well-being, morality, and citizenship are all about human welfare and (I agree with Kitcher) more marginally about the welfare of animals, furthering all of these standard aims depends on the survival not only of humans and their fellow creatures but also other forms of life and the earth itself. For this reason, at least at this point in history, the climate change aim trumps all others in urgency.

My third difficulty is over what Kitcher says about progress in the arts in Chapter 8. He acknowledges the common view that while the sciences make progress, the arts do not:

At first blush, there's an obvious disanalogy. Science is the parade case for progress. On the other hand, 'everybody knows' that the arts (and humanities) don't make progress. Yet we ought to press the point. *Is this something that everybody—or anybody—knows?* (Kitcher 2021: 257)

Before I read Kitcher, I held this common view. The natural sciences are cumulative in the sense that they typically build on the detailed findings of recent precursors, while artists, although in all sorts of ways influenced by and indebted to their predecessors, do not build on their achievements in this way.

I still hold the common view. So does Kitcher as far as the sciences are concerned (p. 258), and he says nothing to challenge the view that the arts are different in this respect. But, it seems to me, he blurs matters by bringing in *different* ways in which the arts are cumulative or otherwise make progress. He is right that 'We don't lose Sophocles and Shakespeare when we acquire Beckett, Ionesco and Pinter' (p. 258), but to say that new artists add to the historical total of artistic achievements is not to say that they build on the work of recent researchers in the detailed way that scientists typically do.

Kitcher also provides some, admittedly unsystematic, evidence that most people think that works of art enrich their lives more than the experiential process of acquiring scientific understanding, stating that

If my ramshackle evidence represents the human population, a subversive conclusion follows. The official view of scientific progress entails that the case for progress in the arts is stronger than that for progress in the sciences. (Kitcher 2021: 259)

As one sometimes finds when reading Kitcher, there is a certain opacity in this. It is not clear how this second sentence follows from the first. Even if one were to grant that everyone finds more enrichment of their lives in art rather than science, this would do nothing to show—any more than the earlier argument about Sophocles and Shakespeare—that the arts make progress as the sciences do, in building on the work of predecessors.

I have doubts, fourthly, concerning a central suggestion about moral development as an aim of education, discussed in Chapter 5. This has to do with Kitcher's use of the metaphor of a 'toolbox'. He sees problems both with the idea that individuals should be brought up uncritically to follow the moral code of their society, and with the notion that staple elements of moral philosophy—complete systems of high-level principles like utilitarianism or Kantianism, or rejections of these in favour of intuitionism or particularism—are reliable guides if one



rejects blind adherence to codes. His view is that, nevertheless, all these—codes, principles, intuitions, etc.—have their uses in moral education. Codes and their elements like precepts or stories of saints and sinners are best seen as ‘tools in a toolbox’ (p. 156), to be used in particular situations. The same is true of moral philosophers’ systems and rejections of these. These, too

are tools, available for individuals and societies, as they attempt to advance the project of morality. ... The challenge for moral education is to collect the tools and help people make use of them. (Kitcher 2021: 173)

This is a novel and arresting perspective on moral education. But I have difficulties in seeing how it is to be applied in children’s development. This is partly because, as seen in the last quotation, the focus of Kitcher’s chapter on ‘moral development’ as an educational aim is not centrally on *children’s* moral learning as portrayed in other accounts of moral education, but on an amalgam of that and the moral progress of society over time. I find this confusing. As regards the metaphor of the toolbox, we need to know more about how individual learners in particular are meant to pick out their tools and apply them as appropriate. Are they *only* to use them in the attempt ‘to advance the project of morality’, as the quotation from p. 173 may suggest? And what, in any case, would it be for them to advance this project? Again, if they are sometimes to pick out from their box a philosophical system or anti-system, doesn’t this imply that all moral learners must have something of a philosophical training that covers these areas. Is this a reasonable suggestion, if so?

For most of this chapter, I miss the children and the shaping of their emotional life so that they expand their sympathies, learn to see things from others’ points of view, learn to cope with jealousy, envy, feelings of antipathy, etc., and apply all this to conflict situations in everyday life. As Kitcher admits on p. 185—which is 87 per cent of the way through the chapter—‘My discussion has largely focused on *social* change’. The individual moral learner begins to come to life only in the last four pages.

I have reservations, finally, about Kitcher’s notion of personal fulfilment. This is described in a passage already quoted, and elaborated elsewhere:

According to my Deweyan perspective, the fulfilled life is one in which a person freely chooses and pursues a project, a life plan, intended to contribute to other human lives, one that succeeds in adding its own increment of value to the vast human project. (Kitcher 2021: 83)

See also: ‘Our plans of life aim to contribute to the human project’ (p. 98).

I have four problems with this. The first is free choice (in Kitcher’s sense) as a necessary condition of fulfilment. In our modern world most of us take for granted that autonomous choice—of partners, employment, place of residence, leisure pursuits, and so on—is an essential component of our well-being. But in a pre-modern world governed by custom, we can surely distinguish between those for whom life goes well—who have loving families and friends, interesting work, adequate income, and good health—from those lacking these things. At best, Kitcher’s definition applies only to our way of life in a modern industrialized society.

Second, need a personally fulfilling life involve intending to contribute to other human lives? A loner, who is also a visual artist and spends all his time with some success in that pursuit, leads a life of absorption in an activity generally taken to be intrinsically worthwhile. If, in addition, early in life he resolves to burn all his works before he dies, can one say that he has intended to contribute to other human lives? Or even contributed to them without intending to? Even if neither of these things is the case, there may be no reason to think he has not found fulfilment in life. This is not to deny that our own fulfilment generally comes at least partly through the relationships one has with others, or through helping them in other ways to live more abundantly. The question is: need it? A fulfilled life need not be a good life in a moral sense.

Third, need the fulfilled life involve having a life plan in the sense of an all-embracing project such as Kitcher has in mind, rather than in the weaker sense of the long-term structuring of one's career or finances? Some, like Rawls in *Theory of Justice* (1971: ch. 7), claim that it does, while others, including myself, are more sceptical. Larmore (1999: 111) says that the good life is not 'the life lived in accord with a rational plan. It is the life lived with a sense of our dual nature as active and passive beings, bent on achieving the goals we espouse, but also liable to be surprised by forms of good we never anticipated'. Bernard Williams writes that life plan theorists:

agree that as a matter of fact ignorance and other factors do usually make it rational to discount over remoteness in time, but these are subsequent considerations brought to a model which is that of one's life as a rectangle, so to speak, presented all at once and to be optimally filled in. (Williams 1981: 33)

The notion of seeing one's life from without is especially salient in the conditions that Kitcher imposes on his account of a life plan. This brings me to my fourth problem.

According to Kitcher, one has to see one's plan not only as contributing to others' well-being but as 'participation in the "human project"' (Kitcher 2021: 88), or as furthering 'the vast human project', this being the measure of its success (p. 83). If we take this at face value, it enlarges Williams' rectangle to huge dimensions. We see our lives from the outside not only as individual phenomena, but as specks in human existence as a whole. The theme of human life as a collective project of gradual improvement stretching from prehistoric times into the far future recurs through Kitcher's chapter on fulfilment and elsewhere in the book down to the Miltonian vision at its very end. The notion of fulfilment that he builds on this deviates greatly from more common accounts, whether in terms of desire-satisfaction, an objective list, or another variant. None of them require anything as grandiose as putting one's shoulder to the wheel of pan-human amelioration. Kitcher's account of fulfilment seems not to be shining a light on a widely shared concept, but rather constructing one based on his own deeply held beliefs, but too heady for most of us.

Kitcher may reply to this that ' "life plans" can be tacitly present in everyday choices' (p. 84), or that 'as she decides to live here rather than there, among these people instead of among those, to engage in some forms of activity and to reject others, a sense of what matters emerges' (p. 97). This would undercut the idea that life-planning implies that we must consciously see our lives from the outside

in the grandiose way just described. But it raises a problem of its own. Can a life plan be merely implicit in this way?

I cannot understand this. If there is a plan, there must be a planner, and a planner must have some goal in mind. Kitcher goes on to say of the woman he describes,

There may never come a moment at which she specifies her 'plan of life' ... Yet if a sensitive and comprehending observer were to present her with an articulated version of her 'central project', we might expect her to agree—'Yes, that is who I am, and those are the things that matter to me'. (Kitcher 2021: 97)

But looking back on one's life and seeing a pattern in it of this sort is different from seeing a plan in it (see also Heyd and Miller 2010: 21ff). This does not necessarily rule out that one's life has been planned. Some religious people may see their life as the working out of God's plan. But the secular Kitcher would have no truck with this:

Like Dewey, I have stepped back from any transcendental perspective, replacing the thought of contributing to the project of the deity with that of advancing a collective human endeavour. (Kitcher 2021: 89)

This links with his statement that 'The vision of living well through contributing to the human project is central to Dewey's philosophy' (p. 40), citing this passage from the latter's book *A Common Faith*:

We who now live are parts of a humanity that extends into the remote past, a humanity that has interacted with nature. The things in civilization we most prize are not of ourselves. They exist by grace of the doings and sufferings of the continuous human community in which we are a link. Ours is the responsibility of conserving, transmitting, rectifying and expanding the heritage of values we have received that those who come after us may receive it more solid and secure, more widely accessible and more generously shared than we have received it. (Dewey 1986: 57–8)

I wonder how close Kitcher's central idea is to Dewey's vision as expressed here? Like Kitcher, Dewey describes us as parts of a humanity that stretches far into the past. He also speaks of transmitting our heritage to 'those who come after us'. But what does he mean? What timescale does he have in mind? Is he merely referring to the next few generations? Kitcher takes him as suggesting that we view 'ourselves as small links in an enormous chain extending into the remote past (and, with luck, into a lengthy future)' (Kitcher 2021: 83). This would perhaps align Dewey with Kitcher's notion of 'the vast human project'. I do not know whether there is any firmer evidence that this is the case.

Relatedly, I wonder how far there is a religious element in Kitcher's notion? There certainly is in the passage from Dewey above. This passage comes almost at the end of *A Common Faith*, a short work written some years after he had gradually given up the Congregationalist faith in which he had been brought up, but revealing his explicit continued attachment to aspects of *religion* despite his antipathy towards *religions*. Immediately after the passage quoted above and cited by Kitcher, Dewey writes:

Here are all the elements for a religious faith that shall not be confined to sect, class, or race. Such a faith has always been implicitly the common faith of mankind. It remains to make it explicit and militant. (Dewey 1986: 58)

For Dewey, therefore, the notion of preserving values to pass on to those who come after us has a religious connotation. Does *this* provide firmer evidence that Dewey, as well as Kitcher, has in mind contributions to ‘the vast human project’? The idea of planning on a cosmic scale so as to bring about some great benefit is originally religious. Christians talk of God’s plan, mentioned above, e.g. to fill the earth with his glory, human beings being the vehicle for this. Is the Dewey of *A Common Faith* still affected by this kind of vision?

This leads me to wonder whether Kitcher’s notion of individual life plans intended to contribute to the human project might in some way be a secular version of religious thinking? In White (2021) I describe how the ex-Episcopalian and now secular Rawls, writing in Chapter 7 of *A Theory of Justice* on the good of the individual, saw life-planning as central to this, and how he was indebted for this idea to the earlier American philosopher Josiah Royce. The latter was attached from a Christian perspective to the idea of a personal life plan devoted to a single cause shared with a community of others. Commenting on this, Heyd and Miller write:

Taken literally, the concept of a life plan turns out to be a fallacious attempt to replace the metaphysical teleological setting for the conduct of human life with an equally ordered program that is subjectively set by individuals for themselves. (Heyd and Miller 2010: 35–6)

How far does Kitcher’s thinking after he abandoned Christianity (see his 2014: xii) also have religious overtones, as Dewey’s did after *he* gave up his earlier faith? This was also true of Rawls after he too turned secular, according to Reidy (2010: 315), who wrote of his ‘abiding appreciation of and respect for a religious orientation towards life’? There is a similar warmth in Kitcher towards what he calls ‘refined religion’ in his remarks in Chapter 6 (Kitcher 2021: 209–14) on religious aims in education (see my summary above). In addition, the quotation above (from p. 89) suggests that he sees his own notion of advancing the human project as a replacement for the religious idea of divine planning. If religion is indeed in the background of his thinking, does this throw light on why, unusually among contemporary philosophers, he is attached to the idea of life-planning?

I realize this foray into speculation may be off target. More solid are the earlier points made above about problems with Kitcher’s notion of life-planning as an element in a fulfilling life, not least his demanding version of this. A further question mark is whether educators should have the right to induct learners into this way of thinking about personal well-being. According to Kitcher, students are freely to choose it. But how genuinely autonomous is this, if their whole education is shaped with ‘free choice’ of a Kitcherian life plan in mind?

I have made clear that I am far from persuaded by Kitcher’s definition of personal fulfilment, just as I have serious doubts about his views on moral development and

the arts. But this does not detract from the convincingness or the freshness of perspective of much of the book's detailed argument.

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