advance a distinctive alternative view of educational goals, a “contemporary cultural pedagogy.”

McDermott briefly responds to all of the essays in an Afterword. One thing that struck me in these afterthoughts was the tension he sees between the social, relational self and the emergence of individuality as such. Thus the social formation of the existential individual results in a divided self threatened by either too much or too little autonomy.

A few critical comments: McDermott presents an anthropocentric account of experience that leaves out non-human nature. Thus the clear-cutting of first the Eastern and then the Western forests, the removal of Native America and the imposition of agriculture during the colonial period and after Independence are scarcely mentioned as indicative of the American character. The transformation of the land that was a precursor to technological society and led up to it are as much a part of American experience as cherry pie. The frontier experience sharpened but did not alter these tendencies and attitudes toward the land.

Gavin argues that Europe could not restrain the Frontier spirit initiated by the Puritans. But Europe did place normative constraints on American Puritanism in the form of Reason, the standard of the Enlightenment, which influenced Jefferson in particular. Jefferson rewrote the Bible to conform to what he considered to be plausible by rational standards. Gavin/McDermott are surely right in interpreting the Puritans as Biblically inspired, as the New Hebrews settling in the Promised Land and transforming it by the Grace of God. And their attitudes toward the natives, as latter-day Philistines, pervaded much of Colonial and post-Colonial America. But the Biblical strain was only one of several—Georgia was settled by convicts, New York by merchants and Virginia and the other southern colonies largely by cavaliers, sons of the well to do classes who did not receive inheritances due to the British custom of primogeniture. These groups came to America with quite different outlooks, formed by quite different experiences, and behaved accordingly.

Altogether an excellent book, highly worth reading, as well as a good introduction to McDermott’s considerable output. The editors did a balanced job and the contributors both expound upon McDermott’s philosophy and raise pertinent questions for critical examination.

Hugh McDonald

New York Institute of Technology


If speculative philosophy is noting and then arguing for ‘correlations’ between or among apparently distinct domains, then this book is clearly an exercise in speculative philosophy. From a wide-angle perspective, it seeks to establish correlations between quantum mechanics and Whitehead’s cosmological scheme. In this it carries on a project
announced in the 1960's by Abner Shimony, and later developed, to a modest degree, by
Henry Folse, George Lucas and others, but never really with an eye to the detail which
such a project deserves or requires. From a more narrow-angle perspective, Epperson’s
book provides much of that missing detail, by seeking to establish correlations between
ontological, decoherence-based interpretations or “imaginative rationalizations” of
quantum mechanics, especially those which countenance ‘historical routes’ of system
states, and both the ‘mechanical’ aspect of Whitehead’s scheme, with its phases of
concrescence, and the Categorical Obligations presupposed by that aspect of his scheme.

Epperson says that the theological implications of his proposed synthesis “lie
outside” the scope of his book, but by the end, when he asserts (without supporting
argument) that its “logically impossible” for science or philosophy to explain away the
concepts and actualities necessarily presupposed by religion, its clear that all along the
speculation has been guided substantively by a very broad vision indeed. For Epperson
speculative philosophy is ‘particularly suited’ to noting and arguing for correlations
among not two but three domains, philosophy, religion and science, but without thereby
succumbing to the reductive and other unfortunate tendencies of ‘materialism,’ especially
its tendency to determinism. Epperson assumes throughout that should we succumb to
these tendencies the world will become unheimlich, as it was for C.S. Lewis, who in this
regard Epperson quotes with much approval, as an ending flourish for his book.

Occasionally the noted assumption leads Epperson away from his normally
evenhanded evaluation. When evaluating David Bohm’s interpretation of quantum
mechanics, for instance, he focuses almost exclusively on Bohm’s determinism, to the
neglect of those features of Bohm’s Wholeness and the Implicate Order that certainly
seem to ‘correlate’ with Whitehead’s philosophy. To cite another instance, when he
evaluates the quantum mechanical cosmogonic models proposed by Stephen Hawking
and James Hartle, he insists that the idea of a quantum vacuum, with its pure potentiality,
is fundamentally incoherent on the ‘logical’ ground that potentiality necessarily requires
actuality. The ground is conceptual or theoretical; and treating it as ‘logical’ is too subtly
preemptory, given the cutting-edge status of such models.

Epperson’s intended audience consists of readers with varying familiarity with
quantum mechanics and with Whitehead’s philosophy, and even includes those with no
background in either area. The book thus tries to fill a somewhat odd niche; and while it
succeeds, to an admirable degree, some of its intended audience will perhaps not be
served as well as they might have been. Those who have prior familiarity with quantum
mechanics, or philosophy and Whitehead’s philosophy, will perhaps want more
(technical) detail, or more sustained argument, than they sometimes will find. Those with
little or no such familiarity will no doubt be helped by the concise reviews of background
material that Epperson provides, but those accounts are sometimes overly concise. Some
will need to look farther a field, for the information they need.

There is a short “Interlude” between the two main sections of the book, which
introduces the basic features of Whitehead’s scheme, as well as something of the
motivation that lies behind it, especially the concern to avoid materialism and
determinism. The first main section of the book summarizes both some of the key areas within quantum mechanics, and certain of the contemporary controversies within each of those areas. Here Epperson takes pains to establish ontological interpretations as preferable to their merely epistemic competitors, and to defend the decoherence family of interpretations in particular, according to which only the universe as a whole is a closed system, the only sort of system to which quantum mechanics applies in the first place. Every portion of the universe interacts with other portions, under this line of interpretation; these interactions play a crucial role in the elimination of interfering potentia, such as those relevant to Schrödinger’s famous paradox of the cat. The second main section contains so much detailed comparison that little can be done in a short review to offer any helpful summary. Suffice it to say that the comparisons are more ambitious than others so far undertaken, and that whether or not they succeed, any student of either the interpretation of quantum mechanics or Whitehead’s philosophy will want to consider them carefully, case by case. In this regard the book really does represent a decisive moment in the project announced by Shimony in the 1960’s.

If either philosophical ‘materialism’ or deterministic interpretations of quantum mechanics are false, then there will need to be realities that do not derive merely from actual, antecedent states, as Heisenberg suggested in his effort to eliminate the paradoxes of quantum mechanics. There will need to be “potentialities of definiteness,” designated as ‘potentia’ by Epperson, which are, under his proposed ‘synthesis,’ either closely related to, or identical with, Whitehead’s ‘eternal objects.’ Are the two closely related, or are they identical? Epperson doesn’t really address the conceptual issue raised by that question, even when he insists that quantum mechanics is an ‘exemplification’ of Whitehead’s scheme. He seems to think that quantum mechanical potentia can be exemplifications of Whitehead’s potentia under some less rigorous standard than the standard in effect supplied by Leibniz’s Law or its near-cousins, for instance; but in the final analysis he is silent about what that alternative standard might be.

Michael Brown
Creighton University


David Hansen has assembled a variety of unique voices that illuminate and deepen our appreciation of Dewey’s classic text. Indeed, Hansen appears to model the volume on his observation that “Democracy and Education is many books in one” (184). While some chapters focus on ideas that can be put to work in modifying pedagogical practices others address the relation between Democracy and Education and Dewey’s oeuvre. Happily, the parts hang together with the cohesion one would expect from a lively informed conversation. Indeed, as I read the volume I frequently felt like a participant in an ongoing dialogue about Dewey’s book.