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## *An Analysis of the Philosophical and Educational Thoughts of John Dewey*

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### *Abstract*

The purpose of this study was to collect and analyze John Dewey's ideas on education and ontological aspect of human's life. A descriptive analytical method was used for data collection in the article. the content of study was the document's that reflect the Dewey s idea about ontology and Anthropology. an attempt is made to focus on Dewey's notions on education with an emphasis on experience, principle of education, principle of experience, principle of change.

***Key Words:*** Ontology; Anthropology; Education, Dewey.

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### ***Introduction***

Education plays an important role in man's life; from the time of his birth, man has been looking for proper education. The need for education has been persisting since the time of Socrates. Whenever we refer to the main discourse into the subject of creation, man's intuition, and the meaning of life, we need to refer to education and the role it has played in the life of man. (Bazargan, 1377) In the modern societies, man pays special attention to education, and education is considered a priority. (Moayyeri, 1377)

Here we need to pay attention to the issues of ontology and anthropology from John Dewey's point of view, and the latter's influence on the 20<sup>th</sup> century thinkers like Hegel, Pierce, and William James; Dewey has been a pioneer of pragmatism. Although he is dead now, but his name and ideas persist in different institution around the world. He represents a stream of thought that has been dominating the contemporary world. While traveling to different countries like Russia, China, and Japan, he introduced changes in the education systems of those countries. In China, he has been improving the educational system through his student, Tao Exingzhi. (Maykutp, 1994)

As far as the ontological and anthropological principles are concerned, Dewey is indebted to Hegelism and Darwinism; the two dominant principles influenced Dewey are "Hegelian dialectic" and "Darwinian evolution;" Dewey believes that both the principles

have affected man's behavior and nature. (Milton, 2011) The important objective in this article is a study of Dewey's ideas on education. Since every notion and scientific and philosophical theory has its origin in the past, the present study intends to focus on the fundamental thought and ideas of Dewey, and the way these thoughts are employed in the modern society. Although there are many books on the influence of Dewey on the modern education, but there are two basic issues needed to be further studied; the first one concerns the development of the society, educational problems and their solutions proposed by Dewey and influenced by Darwinian evolution. Dewey favors change and he is against any stagnation in the world's problems; for the purpose, he proposes solutions influenced by Hegel and Marx. Although he has a different notion of life from that of Marx, but he always refers to the famous statement made by Marx when the latter says: "Philosophy should change the world, not to interpret it." Dewey considers philosophy as the philosophy of education, the purpose of which is to change and develop man's position in the society. As far as his defense of freedom and democracy is concerned, he is greatly affected by the liberalists like John Lock.

The other issue to be considered here is empiricism that is influenced by the thoughts of such thinkers like Bacon and other English empiricists. The result of Dewey's ontological thoughts is more a pragmatic instrumentality

and relativism. The denial of the static notions of the philosophers play important roles in the latter's inclination towards relativism. Focusing on the society's need for democracy, Dewey has stated criticizing the official education system and its objectives. (Kardan, 2003) From the pragmatic point of view, man is a biological and social creature who is in continuous connection with the world. Man is not separate from nature, but he is a part of nature, and is continuously affected by his natural and social environment.

### *Literature Review*

A research entitled "A Study of John Dewey's Notions of Education" was commenced, based on data collected from library. The results indicated that the pragmatism, Dewey's notion in particular, has implemented basic changes in the field of education. The method of teaching is changed from traditional to the experimental one. The main objective of education and the role of students have been changed from passive to active roles. The teacher is not endowed with traditional role of dictating, and his duty is to guide students in their learning.

A research entitled "A Critical Study of John Dewey's Philosophy" (Rahnamaee, 2015) focuses on three groups of ontology, anthropology, and epistemology in Dewey's philosophy. It deals with the development of Dewey's thought with reference to Darwinian Theory of evolution.

Another work entitled "A Comparative Study of Educational Teachings of three Thinkers, Rousseau, Pestalozzi, and Dewey" deals with the role of teachers and the type of education required. The results indicate that there are more similarities than differences in their attitudes towards education. Rousseau believes that conduct and virtue occupy better position than knowledge and art respectively. Pestalozzi considers education as a natural development that includes all of the children's talents and abilities. Dewey is in favor of integrity and considers education as a scientific method through which man expounds about science and its value.

In another article entitled "the Theory of Development and Dewey's Ontological Approach", Jerome, 2014 points out to the relationship between these two issues. In another article entitled "A Study of the Theory of Dewey on the impact of Religion on Education" (Mahdavi, 2011), the author points out to Dewey's attitude towards the role of religion on

### *Methodology*

Although there are different researches commenced on Dewey, but as far as the ontological and anthropological factors are concerned, little research is done. In other words, the questions pertaining Dewey's philosophical principles are unanswered. In the present article, an attempt is made to analyze two different attitudes towards the Dewey's philosophical principles; it also tends to study

Dewey's four philosophical principles using descriptive – analytic method.

### *Research Questions*

- 1- What are the Social Conditions Effective on Dewey?
- 2- What are the characteristics of Education as perceived by Dewey?
- 3- What are the Components of Dewey's Philosophy?

### *The Effective Social Conditions*

Basically, without paying attention to the thinkers' economical, social, cultural and political, we cannot study their thoughts and attitudes; this does not necessarily mean that the thinkers in each period reflect their own contemporary thoughts, but what is considered here is that the great thinkers in the history, being affected by their contemporary conditions and other thinkers, have focused on the place of man in the world. Studying Dewey's thoughts, it is necessary to first focus on the contemporary conditions of the thinkers; in this case, we can come to a better understanding of factors creating their thoughts. Dewey belongs to the race of pragmatists and pragmatism consists of deep cultural and social roots that are as follows:

- a) After the migration of the Europeans to America, a society without history was formed. People should be active improving the conditions of life, and should use their own thoughts and wisdom for

the same. Therefore, in the newly - formed society, people were encouraged to rely on their intellectual forces in order to create new thoughts and ideas and use their skills and knowledge to improve their lives. (Ebrahim zadeh, 1995, 94)

- b) The second cultural factor important in the consolidation of the bases of pragmatism, was the active collective lives of the American people. The scattering of people and the abundance of natural resources have caused the establishment of this society in the United States. The European immigrants expanded the American civilization during a period of 200 years. In such a dynamic environment, the American people believed that people needed governments, laws, and social institutions improve their lives.
- c) Another important cultural factor was the focus on future. The newly formed Republic lacked in a strong religious and social system that possessed historical values and rituals. There was no past to form their lives and their way of thinking. Thus, they kept on relying on what happened in the present and what would happen in the future.

- d) The fourth factor was the immigrants' opinion about other individuals and their thoughts; the former kept on assessing the latter. The past of individuals were not considered important.
- e) The other factor was special attention to democracy and the impact of science on the improvement of people's lives. The American people believed that democracy and science paved the way for freedom. In fact, democracy and science are closely related and interact with each other. This factor plays a very important role in the formation of pragmatism. (Kardan, 2001, 193-195)

Dewey is brought up in a society that was greatly industrial and exposed to the new waves of progress that embraces the modern societies; change was inevitable in such society. In this regard, Dewey notes that the change in being deprived of God's blessings or truth is not a sign of shortcoming. Unlike the experimental method that tends to collapse the fixed principles and change them, the new science did not mean to determine a fixed nature and face for each change. (Dewey, 1958, 100)

Dewey denies the duality of intellect and feeling, and considers this distinction harmful. He believes that in the present age, knowledge turns into experience and education through intellectual manipulation, and that for man

knowledge, in its new meaning, is turned into an instrument for power; that in order to create changes and with the transformation of theoretical aspects into true meaning, a relationship is established between knowledge and practice. (Ibid. 100) It is quite clear that Dewey has been greatly affected by the experimental aspects of the new science. He does not consider man, a creature who is not entirely subjugated by nature, but considers him as a creature who can overcome nature by the power of his intellect. Dewey denies any experience prior to experiment and considers whatever affected by experiment, as reliable and true. (Yousefi, 1997, 123) If we accept whatever undergone examination as true, it means that each one of us with follow different social and political point of view, but all of us are prone to examination in order to see how the sacred opinions react to examination. (Dewey, 1958, 134)

### *The Educational Principles from Dewey's Viewpoint*

Dewey is brought up in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century democratic society in the United States. His works are related to his philosophy of experimentation that influenced education in the U.S. the kind of education favored by him is, on one hand, affected by his contemporary democratic and practical American society, and on the other hand, by his own interactions with his society. With these explanations, we intend to

focus on the Dewey's dominating principles in education.

The first principle deals with activity; students are required to be active during their learning process and never remain idle. Thus, activity principle encourages the students to be active and fresh. This principle requires that the students be provided with necessary facilities and opportunities that would make them act and experience. Based on the recent achievements in biology, psychology, and sociology, the pioneers of the school of pragmatism have noticed that man is an active creature who likes to involve himself in world's affairs to guarantee the results of his actions and establish a balance between himself and his environment. (Shokoohi, 1990, 143) based on this principle, the smallest right of the young students is to be left free, let to examine everything by themselves, and get the required results. The more a child acts, the more independent he becomes. We must pay attention of children's present not future' therefore we should not limit their activities; we should let them act freely. On the other hand, the learners should involve themselves in the process of teaching-learning; for the purpose the teachers should do the following:

- 1- Have students accept responsibility
- 2- Have students think
- 3- Provide students with possibilities and opportunities of learning. (Shokoohi, 1990, 143)

Dewey is the greatest supporter of the school of pragmatism. According to Dewey, a student learns things that he personally experiences; this activity is due to his interest in the subject he has taken up and experienced. The motto of learning through practical methods is considered by Dewey as a solution for the persisting problems created by the idealists. (Kardan, 2001, 232) Dewey considers the method of education good only when the children's activity and flexibility makes them easily face with the unexpected events, thus helping them learn responsibility. (Shamshiri and Javadi Nikoo, 2012, 112) According to pragmatism, learning takes place when it is presented practically. The most important duty of the learner is to follow the process of solving problems intellectually.

Principle of Affinity: In this principle, every experience is associated with another experience and will eventually survive in the future. (Naghizadeh, 1996, 165) An important experience depends upon other experiences; such experience that encouraged individuals to have other experiences is acceptable, but the one that bring dislike for other experiences in future is not good and acceptable, because it would withhold improvement. The criterion for being good or bad does not lie in the experiences but in their results. Therefore, this second principle of affinity, concerns future rather than present. This principle shows that every experience is associated with the

past and future. The past experiences are the basis of experiences in the present and the present experiences form the basis for the experiences in future.

Principle of Interaction: Every experience both affects and is affected. In the experiences, both internal and external factors are active; the result of the impact of these two factors is called state. People in the world live in different states and positions; they interact with other people. (Naghizadeh, 1996, 166)

Accompaniment of Science and Practice: Dewey believes that the nature of knowledge should be experimental. He was dissatisfied with the way students some programs make students gather excessive information in their minds. He believes that students make use of this investment in a way that it is transformed into real science. In order to reach the apparent goals required by school and reproducing information or taking examinations and promoting into the higher grade, the students learn things but they are unaware of its relationship with the daily life. Dewey stresses upon the relationship between academic activities with life, and believes that we can be proud of our education principles only when a student enters a school with all his body and mind and leaves the school with a healthier body and richer brain and mind (Naghizadeh, 2009:65).

Dewey explains: "education falls into its natural stream only when the child who has been trained and undergone experiments at home

enters school, and every time he leaves school, he is endowed with a new thought that can be used and tested at home.

Dewey explains four different features of education:

- 1- Education looks like life itself, not preparation for life.
- 2- Education is means of guiding and supporting students and their natural growth.
- 3- Education is a social function and takes place in and for the society.
- 4- Education is practice, a practice that motivated by the trainer and teacher.

These four characteristics are meant to show life, guidance, society, and practical learning, respectively; these characteristics of education are accepted by the contemporary trainers and teachers, and they are further confirmed by psychological and educational researches. Dewey opposes those ordinary methods that are based on the transformation of information, teachers' activities and his essential role in education, that consider practice as a kind of repetition for establishing certain principle in the minds of students; for using such a method, students learn the subject mechanically and superficially, and such a method is an obstacle on the way of students, intellectual growth and creativity. Dewey believes that when a student has personally experienced certain thing practically, he or she is going to learn it properly. For Dewey, the educational method, in

fact, is the research method that is clearly indicated in science, and used by the scientists; Dewey calls this method as the method of solving problems.

**Dewey's School:** It was first in Chicago where contrary to the conventional system of education, and instead of emphasizing the activities that child was expected to do during maturity, Dewey's school began concentrating on those childish activities wherein the child was absorbed. Thus, the main objective of education was not separating child from the natural state of things, but rather assisting the child in overcoming problems he used to face at home and in the environment; because for a little child, such problems are related to the society and family. Dewey maintained that school required such situations; to achieve this, the Dewey school, like traditional school, considered the present possibilities and desires of the child as its fundamental basis. However, Dewey instead of using different academic issue as means of increasing mental strength of the child, imagined the program as a means of making the child achieve results based on the present activities. This was a kind of innovation in itself regarding the educational system of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the emphasis of the authorities at school was on the theoretical methods of teaching, ignoring the practical potentials of the students. Dewey emphasized easy movement of children from home atmosphere to school; he believed that what the children required was

their natural needs such as food, clothes, and comfortable housing. This does not necessarily mean that Dewey insisted that the child learn how to cook at home and how to learn to read and write at school; rather he considered writing and reading instrumental. In fact, one can notice the child's behavior towards other learning materials such as history, science and arts in the same way that other fields have been approached. The value of these materials lies in the fact that such method would improve such fundamental activities like preserving food, housing, or clothes. (Shokoohi, 299)

**Ontology: Denial of Philosophical Absolutism:** Although Dewey's thoughts are constituted on the basis of the hidden truth, but he does not feel comfortable with the persistent contemporary double imagination of truth. He claimed that such imagination is a kind of justification for man that enables him to imagine an irrevocable and perfect domain. (Gotheck, 2012, 125) Dualism consists of different kinds, ignored by Dewey; it does not mean that he is against the dual oppositions, but rather it means that he is trying to abrade the traditional Western philosophy from the metaphysical dual effects. (Rooti, 1386, 37)

In the Dewey's philosophy, the absolute spirit is replaced by intelligence. Science keeps on moving from one stage to another, and it integrate problems and conflicts in such a way that creates motivation. (Skefeler, 1987, 263)

Identifier	Speaker	Data	Document	*Open code *Partial Concepts Code
Pa <sub>1</sub>	John Dewey	The most important principle in the pragmatic ontology is that everything in the world is changing; the world is considered as becoming a being.	Ebrahim 2001, zاده , 205	*Changing the main advantage *A world turning into being
Pa <sub>2</sub>	John Dewey	Dewey associated scientific materialism with James' thoughts, and thus found the key concept of his own philosophy; this key was concept was the relationship between man and his environment	Ebrahim zاده, 2001, 205	*Relationship between man and his environment * Interaction between man and environment
Pa <sub>3</sub>	John Dewey	Pragmatists believe that the world is against them, and experience is considered as the basis of pragmatic ontology. Dewey believes that experience teaches us hoe everything is changing.	Ebrahim zاده, 2001 208	Experience as the basis of ontology
Pa <sub>4</sub>	John Dewey	In Dewey's opinion, the world is insecure. Its dangers are changing but temporary; luck is accompanied with abnormalcy. Whenever there is defeat and disease, ther is power and victory.	Shariatmadri 1978, 124	*An Insecure World *inconsistency of the world
Pa <sub>5</sub>	John Dewey	Dewey's world is like Games' world; both are incomplete. According to Dewey, such a world is different from the closed world, where the particular action takes place as prcise as that of a machine; it is an incomplete world, improving. The man's creative forces have a chance for improvement and change, and man can make use of this opportunity to get involved in the states of affairs.	Butler 282 ·1968	*Indefinte world *Indefinte world
Pa <sub>6</sub>	John Dewey	Experience, in its extensive meaning, constitutes the basis of pragmatism; experience includes sense, perception, thought, judgment, description, and rational attitudes.	Shariatmadari, 1978 195	*Experience as the basis of cosmology

Pa <sub>7</sub>	John Dewey	For man, the meaning of the world makes him aware of his life; if the world has a goal, such a goal appears hidden.	Neller 1998	*Awareness as the basis of cosmology
Pa <sub>8</sub>	John Dewey	Dewey believes that the world is uncertain, that man's search is not for education, but for achieving best methods for improvement.	Ghotek 2008	*Uncertain world
Pa <sub>9</sub>	John Dewey	The world, is a world of future	Shariatmadari 1978	*The Future world
Pa <sub>10</sub>	John Dewey	The world is changing.		*A Changing World
Pa <sub>11</sub>	John Dewey	The world is unsecure and uncertain.		*Uncertain World
Pa <sub>12</sub>	John Dewey	The world is incomplete and indefinite		*Incomplete World
Pa <sub>13</sub>	John Dewey	The world is great.		* Vast World
Pa <sub>14</sub>	John Dewey	The world has concealed its goals.		*Stealthy world
Pa <sub>15</sub>	John Dewey	The world consists of a reality beyond experience.		*A World beyond experience
Pa <sub>16</sub>	John Dewey	Man is related to the world.		*Man's relationship with the world
Pa <sub>17</sub>	John Dewey	The world does not guaranty progress.		*Indifferent World
Pa <sub>18</sub>	John Dewey	Dewey believed that since it is impossible to anticipate the situation of the world in future, thus it is impossible to offer a solution	Naghizadeh 169	*An Instable world impossibility to anticipate the future of the world
Pa <sub>19</sub>	John Dewey	The most important principle in pragmatic ontology is the principle of change, based on which everything in the world is changing, and nothing remains fixed.	Farmihani 1997	The Changing world
Pa <sub>20</sub>	John Dewey	For pragmatists, the world is incomplete, and it is the experience that teaches us that everything changes and thinking is a means of action.	Farmihani 1997, 170	Indefinite world

***Anthropology from Dewey's Point of View***

It should be acknowledged that Dewey can be considered as an important figure in bringing about anthropological perspectives in the

modern world. (Jamali. 2009, 59) Dewey emphasizes the power of the cultural institutions in shaping individuals, and thus focuses on social psychology; relying on biology, he considers man's nature

as an organized mass, consisting of drives and reflections. He believed in power of the unconscious; unlike Freud who explored the unconscious power inside man, he explored such power in the social and cultural situations of the society. (Bagheri, 1997, 164) From Dewey's point of view, man is a biological creature who is bound to the world; that man is not separate from the world, but he is a part of nature and is continuously in touch with it. This biological creature, is continuously affected by his natural and social surrounding, because he lives in the society, and is a member of that society. Thus,

although men differ in different aspects, but they are bound together and interact with each other. Man's thought is in the service of the people, meaning that man's idea reflects that of his society. (Dewey, 1948)

Dewey explains about the flow of experience, where mind is improved as a kind of social and vital entity; it is not only affected by other actions, the latter also affect it. Dewey ascribes to man a spiritual entity. He maintains that there is no virtual soul that can be different from body. (Sajaddi, 2001, 159.)

Pa21	John Dewey	According to Dewey, man's survival depends upon his interaction with natural environment. He believes that men should use nature as a means of changing some parts of the environment.	Guttek,2006:121	* Man's interaction with nature
Pa22	John Dewey	Experience emphasizes man's experience that would rather connect idea and action, reality, value, intellect, and emotion than separate them.	Guttek,2006	* Experience as cause of unity
Pa23	John Dewey	Like his other notions, Dewey's anthropology is derived from other notations; materialism and naturalism are his most important attitudes.	Dewey, 1964:37	* Naturalism, the most important attitude
Pa24	John Dewey	His recognition of man has its origin in the scientific research that is based on experience.	Dewey, 1964:37	* Experience, the basis for the recognition of man
Pa25	John Dewey	Experience is a current issue, and it cannot present a	Dewey, 1964:37	* Experience,

		perfect and final image of man, but only a part of man;s image can be visible, like a shadow.		an incessant stream
Pa26	John Dewey	Man is a part of nature, and society is formed through biological evolution. Social problems cannot be separated from natural sciences. Thus the methods used in the natural sciences can also be used in social investigations.	Dewey ,1964	* Society, the result of man's evolution
Pa27	John Dewey	According to Dewey, man's survival depends upon his interaction with nature.	Gutek, 2006:129	* Man's interaction with nature
Pa28	John Dewey	Dewey recommends man's unity with nature.	Gutek, 2006:129	* Man's unity with nature
Pa29	John Dewey	Man lives in an environment that is both natural and social.	Gutek, 2006:130	* Natural and social man
Pa30	John Dewey	Man as a device maker creature possesses subjective signification.	Gutek, 2006:132	* Man, device maker creature
Pa31	John Dewey	Dewey considers the basis of evolution as the relationship among different creatures. Man is not separate from animals, in that both are affected by biological factors. Everything depends upon nature.	Shariatmadari , 2001:341	* Evolution, the basis for biological existence
Pa32	John Dewey	Man is not the powerful ruler of the world.	SHariatmadari , 2001:344	* Man's lack of free will
Pa33	John Dewey	Dewey does not approve of such binary issues like nature and beyond nature, soul and body, material and spiritual.	Naghizadeh, 2009:164	* Lack of man's duality
Pa34	John Dewey John	From Dewey's point of view, not only separating man from nature, but also	Naghizadeh, 2009:164	* Social and natural man

	Dewey	man's separation from social background is not appropriate.		
Pa35	John Dewey	Dewey does not consider separation of idea from action acceptable.	Naghizadeh, 2009:165	* Unity of idea and action
Pa36	John Dewey	Originality of matter: man's spiritual self is underestimated.	Hozeh-Kardan, 2005:245	* Man's materialistic attitude
Pa37	John Dewey	Reality of self: self is not a fixed entity but rather keep on changing by means of arbitrary verbs.	Hozeh-Kardan, 2005:245	* Difference in self
Pa38	John Dewey	Based on Dewey's opinion, men live in uncertain places where their lives are threatened. Since real life in continuously in danger, the traditional thinkers distinguish between inconsistent common life and the security gains through the perfect and unchangeable reality.	Gutek, 2006:125	* Uncertain world
Pa39	John Dewey	According to Dewey, the survival of man depends upon his interaction with nature.	Gutek, 2006:129	* Man's interaction with nature
Pa40	John Dewey	Man lives in a collective and natural environment and it is essential for him to interact with such society.	Gutek, 2006:130	* Natural and social man
Pa41	John Dewey	Man as a device maker creature possesses subjective signification.	Gutek, 2006:132	* Device making man
Pa42	John Dewey	From pragmatics' point of view man is biological creature; he is also social; that is why man's free will is not appreciated.	Farmihani, 2006:169	* Social and biological man
Pa43	John Dewey	From pragmatics' point of view man is biological creature; he cannot be separated from nature; he is a part of nature and is	Farmihani, 2006:170	Man's naturalness

	greatly affected by his social and natural environment.		
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**Conclusion**

As indicated above, Dewey’s ontology consists of many important features. One of the most important principles in his ontology is the principle of change, based on which everything in the world is changing; thus the world is on the verge of becoming. Dewey and the other pragmatists believe are concerned with the world in front of them , and they believe that experience, in its extensive meaning, is the basis of cosmology, to the extent that Dewey states that it is experience that teaches us that everything is changing. According to Dewey, man’s life depends on his interaction with environment, and man is a part of nature; he maintains that what constitutes society is biological evolution. Social issues cannot be excluded from the field of natural science, therefore, it is wrong to separate human issues from natural issues. Dewey recommends that man should be united with nature, and

believes that man is both natural and social. From an epistemological point of view, Dewey also believes that recognition has an experimental characteristic, based on common sense that follows the same scientific method. He believes that thinking begins to occur, when an undetermined situation or unequal necessity appears. In his attempt to meet his needs, man turns to thought that is considered as an instrument for his happiness. Dewey believes that original thought would occur when man faces difficulties and decides to solve them through scientific methods. Dewey’s epistemology is considered as a way of resolving problems. Dewey considers two kinds of values: inherent values and instrumental values; Dewey considers human experience as the basis for these values. The important features pertaining to Dewey’s philosophical foundations are summed up in the following table.

**Important Features of Dewey’s Ontology**

Subject	Features
Ontology	Principle of change; Principle of experience ; Uncertain World and undetermined World; The world is changing ; The world is dissolvable; Experience is the basis of life; The World is great; The World is uncertain

**Important Features of Dewey’s Anthropology**

Subject	Features
Anthropology	The Principle of Interaction with Environment; The Principle of Integration in Unity; The Principle of Naturalism;

	Biological Evolution; Social Principle; Man needs to interact with environment; Man's experience is the main cause for the unity of thought, action, truth, value, rationality, and emotion; Man is a part of nature and society is the outcome of Man's biological evolution; Man is both natural and social.
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