European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy

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**Book Review**

Symposia

Pragmatism and the Social Sciences

A Century of Influences and Interactions
Editors’ Introduction to the Symposia

The history of the influences and interactions between pragmatism and the social sciences is as rich as it has been neglected as a field of research. This volume – the first of a series of two – tries to explore both historically and theoretically some of these multiple relationships, building upon the assumption that pragmatism has been one of the philosophical traditions that have taken most seriously the study of the social. In fact, since its origins classical American pragmatism has been a philosophy resolutely open to the social sciences. Not only pragmatists have been actively engaged in social scientific research themselves (think of W. James, J. Dewey, G.H. Mead, C. Morris), but they have also conceived of the birth and development of the social sciences as one of the most innovative traits of modern society, the one truly capable of incarnating the pragmatist conception of the scope of knowledge within human experience. It was mostly to social sciences, in fact, that pragmatist philosophers, social scientists, and reformers such as J. Dewey, W. E. B. Du Bois, L. Trilling, S. Hook, C. W. Mills turned to in order to find the analytical categories that could make philosophical thinking more attuned to the transformations changing contemporary societies. At the same time, the social sciences have always looked at pragmatism as a philosophy that offers useful critical tools for making sense of social, cultural and political practices and institutions.

If we look at this rich exchange from the perspective of pragmatism as a philosophical tradition, the following two dimensions are worth noticing. The first concerns the very idea of what is philosophy, what are its main goals, which are its methods. Contrary to what had been done in philosophy before pragmatism and contrary to what will be done afterwards, the pragmatists have shaped their philosophical understanding through a dialogue with the social sciences. Indeed, pragmatism evolved at a time when the social sciences – notably sociology, psychology, anthropology and economics – were beginning to differentiate themselves from the common tree of philosophy. The pragmatists have generally been aware of the great potential embedded in the new social sciences. James and Mead travelled to Europe to learn about the new experimental psychology to which they contributed in a significant manner, while Dewey never tired to celebrate the importance of the social


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sciences in thinking and giving shape to a more inclusive, just and human world. In addition, one has to remark that pragmatism itself as a philosophy was developed and deeply influenced by the epistemological rupture brought about by the genesis and disciplinary constitution of the social sciences: at a time when most of the European philosophical traditions were looking at the hard sciences as the new paradigm for a scientific philosophy, pragmatism saw in the rise of the social sciences a new approach to the understanding and the control of social life. For a philosophical tradition determined to sever the ancient bond with the representational conception of knowledge, the social sciences were delivering materials and methods pointing toward an engaged, transformational and emancipatory conception of philosophy: the new sciences of education, society, politics, urban studies, social psychology and anthropology offered pragmatist philosophers new understandings of the role of, as well as of the nature of, philosophy as an academic discipline. While the self image of mainstream European and American philosophy was being shaped by its ancillary dependence from the hard sciences and while the new social sciences were shaping their identity through the disciplinary opposition to philosophy, pragmatists were trying to explore the unbeaten and uncertain path of a social philosophy that wished to blur the institutional boundaries between science and practice, descriptive and normative sciences, knowledge and action, academic research and active engagement. This program, as some of the papers included in this volume show, is gaining new currency.

A second lesson that pragmatism has learnt from the social sciences has been to take the social dimension seriously. The social sciences taught pragmatists how to think about the social, how to incorporate the social dimension in their educational, political, logical, and aesthetic thought. This is mostly visible in Dewey’s and Mead’s philosophies. But the importance of the social dimension can also be easily traced back to James’s thought, and – though less distinctly – to Peirce’s conception of social impulse and his notion of the social dimension of inquiry. This theme, so powerfully chased out of philosophy for more than fifty years, is becoming prominent again, which helps explaining the growing interest among philosophers of different kinds in pragmatism. At a time when so many are turning to the practices and to the social as central explanatory philosophical categories, one should perhaps give a fresh look to the pragmatist texts, where the epistemological primacy of practices and the centrality of the social had so powerfully been articulated well before the practices and the social were (re)-discovered.

At the same time, one can see that this process of learning has proceeded also in the opposite direction. In what concerns the contributions of American philosophical pragmatism to the social sciences, four main ideas can be singled out. The first has to do with the conception of human beings as meaning-making organisms. Human beings relate with the surrounding environment (including physical and social objects), as well as the past and the future, by means of the symbolic representations they make of those objects and categories. The social order, no less than the moral, political or economic orders, thus has an inextricably symbolic character. However, contrary to the social constructivism that dominated social sciences discourse from the 1980s onwards, which often portrayed human agency as uncoerced, classical philosophical pragmatism has always insisted upon the constitutive nature of these symbolic constructions: in other words, human agency is simultaneously enabled and constrained by institutions such as the state – states allow for more complex forms of cooperative life than any other organizational arrangement but can be, nevertheless, extremely powerful sources of coercion. This important insight is usually accompanied by an interest in language. Especially after the 1960s, social scientists gradually become more interested in human linguistic forms of communication, from the post-
structuralist view of discourse as a form of power and domination to the critical theory’s interest in disentangling communicative forms of action and rationality from their strategic and instrumental counterparts. Again, as the case of the discourse ethics developed by Jürgen Habermas and Karl-Otto Apel illustrates, the influence of classical American philosophical pragmatism was pivotal. In this issue, almost every paper touches upon at least one of these contributions. But pragmatism’s contributions extend beyond the emphasis on language and the symbolic nature of reality.

As a process philosophy, pragmatism has exerted a notable influence upon those interested in superseding rigid dualistic modes of thinking. In disciplines like sociology or political science the pervasiveness of dualisms such as individual/society or mind/body has been a reality for the better part of the last century. Critical voices within those disciplines have often found in pragmatism an important ally to overcome such dualistic modes of thinking. A good example of this tendency is James Johnson’s article, where he questions a number of persisting dualisms in political science (more below). A final relevant contribution of philosophical pragmatism to contemporary social sciences refers to the crucial link between science and democracy. A classical theme among pragmatists such as Dewey or Mead, the emphasis on the internal relation between science as a problem-solving cooperative activity and democracy as a form of life has been appropriated and reconstructed by, among others, deliberative democrats of the Habermasian sort. As such, pragmatism has been a shaping force in contemporary political theory. These are, of course, but a few examples of the contributions made by pragmatism to work in the social sciences. But they suffice to help us make the point that social scientists, both more empirically or theoretically oriented, in the US and elsewhere, have been drawing upon the intellectual resources of American philosophical pragmatism in various ways. Though never a dominant influence in mainstream social science, pragmatism has nevertheless proved to be a valuable ally for those willing to critically engage with those dominant modes of thinking.

The way we have organized this issue reflects this particular mode of engagement between philosophical pragmatism and the social sciences. The issue is composed of three main sections. The first includes papers that offer general reflections upon the various ways in which pragmatism has influenced social science research. As noted above, although pragmatism was never a central influence in the social sciences over the course of the twentieth century, pragmatist ideas did impact certain social fields and sub-disciplines. A case in point is the sociological tradition of symbolic interactionism (SI), whose philosophical tenets are explicitly pragmatist. But this can hardly be said to have been the case in other sociological traditions, let alone in other, more “positive”, social sciences, such as economics or political science. This is exactly where Peter Manicas, with his “American Social Science: The Irrelevance of Pragmatism”, starts off. Manicas builds his case against a “good deal of received opinion” according to which American pragmatism has been a strong influence in social sciences in the US. His argument is that there is hardly any evidence to support such a claim. On the contrary, mainstream American social science has evolved in relative isolation from the ideas of pragmatist authors such as Peirce, James and Dewey. Pragmatism was simply incompatible with the positivistic outlook of the mainstream. Yet, now that positivism has definitively declined, Manicas believes that there is much for social scientists in America to learn from the only philosophical tradition created and developed in that country. The second paper is by Patrick Baert and is entitled “Neo-Pragmatism and Phenomenology: A Proposal”. Here we are offered a pragmatist-inspired proposal for a philosophy of social sciences that rejects foundationalism, naturalism and representationalism while emphasizing self-understanding. Baert’s strategy is to reconcile
American philosophical pragmatism with the work of the Continental European hermeneutics of Gadamer, Levinas and Sartre, something he does very convincingly. His neo-pragmatist social theory is one of the most innovative approaches in the field today. The first group of papers ends with Eugene Halton’s “Pragmatic E-Pistols”, where we are offered a number of imaginary letters addressed to several key figures of classical American philosophical pragmatism, including William James, Charles Peirce, George Herbert Mead, and John Dewey. Especially noteworthy is the way in which Halton intertwines his own ideas with those of his imaginary addressees thus bringing those “classics” ideas back to the present.

If this first group of papers discusses the relatively marginal role of pragmatist ideas in the development of social science, the second group revolves around the question of how pragmatism has nevertheless helped empowering various marginalized groups in society. In this second group of contributions, politically hot issues such as power, legality, politics and social exclusion are addressed. The first paper, by Susan Haack, is entitled “Pragmatism, Law, and Morality: The Lessons of Buck v. Bell” and it discusses the key pragmatist ideas by reference to Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes’ legal thinking and practice. In particular, she offers a detailed analysis of the 1927 Buck vs. Bell case, in which the forced sterilization of an institutionalized woman, Carrie Buck, was at stake. By a majority of 8-1, the Supreme Court decided that sterilizing Carrie Buck did not constitute a violation of her fundamental constitutional rights. The fact that was Holmes who wrote the ruling for the majority provides Haack with an opportunity to discuss at length the potentials and limitations of legal pragmatism. This relation between philosophical ideas and pressing real-world legal and moral issues, such as those raised by the eugenics programs implemented in the US and various European countries from the early twentieth century well into the 1970s, ties in nicely with Patricia Hill Collins’s “Piecing Together a Genealogical Puzzle: Intersectionality and American Pragmatism”. As Collins explains, intersectionality, a term first coined in the late 1980s by the critical race theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw, is a “knowledge project” that revolves around a number of shared ideas, namely “(1) how race, class, gender and sexuality constitute intersecting systems of power; (2) how specific social inequalities that reflect these power relations from one setting to the next; (3) how identities of race, gender, are socially constructed within multiple systems of power; and (4) how social problems and their remedies are similarly constructed within intersecting systems of power”. A genealogy of this intersectionalist discourse in American social sciences is then systematically confronted with the genealogy of pragmatist ideas around three key issues, experience, social inequalities and social action. From this genealogical reconstruction, Collins is then able to identify a number of paths not yet taken by either theoretical tradition, in what must certainly be one of the most valuable contributions in this issue. A similar concern with bringing excluded voices into the academic conversation is found in Bill Lawson’s “Of President Barack H. Obama and Others: Public Policy, Race-talk, and Pragmatism”. Focusing on the case of African-Americans, Lawson makes use of W.E.B. Du Bois’s seminal 1903 Souls of Black Folk to critically re-examine Barack Obama’s color-blind public policies. Lawson’s claim is that Obama’s universalistic approach will have a detrimental impact on the social and economic standing of African Americans. One solution to such an unintended and undesired consequence is a pragmatic understanding of race, which would help Obama to see why we still need both race-talk and race conscious policies. Race, socioeconomic inequality, and human rights are but three examples of a critical agenda in the social sciences that philosophical pragmatism has been helping to foster in the US and abroad.
This examination of the ways in which practitioners outside philosophy have appropriated pragmatist ideas is continued in the final section of the issue, where the cases of sociology, social psychology, political science, economics, and psychiatry are discussed. In his paper “Towards a social externalism: Pragmatism and ethnomethodology”, Louis Queré offers us a stimulating analysis of the complicated reception of G.H. Mead’s ideas by ethnomethodologists. Queré’s argument is that the willingness by ethnomethodologists to distance themselves from symbolic interactionists has contributed to prevent them from engaging more productively with Mead, the “founding father” of SI. In particular, Queré directs his attention to the ethnomethodologists’s critique of Mead’s social psychology alleged “externalism”, which he rightly dismisses. Queré’s historical journey thus helps us recall one important truth, namely that disciplinary boundaries and allegiances can obfuscate or even block otherwise fruitful encounters. Mead’s pragmatism is also discussed in Mitchell Aboulafia’s “Through the Eyes of Mad Men: Simulation, Interaction, and Ethics”, a critical re-examination of simulation theory, which has gained huge currency among neuroscientists as a way of explaining how we attribute mental states and predict human behavior. Aboulafia’s critical engagement with simulation theory draws on Mead’s theory of the social self with a view not only to highlight weaknesses in simulation theory, but also to assist in addressing ethical questions in a more sophisticated and comprehensive way than simulation theory. Given the current buzz around neurosciences, this is an important and timely discussion. The following paper, “Between Political Inquiry and Democratic Faith: A Pragmatist Approach to Visualizing Publics”, takes us to the field of political science. James Johnson’s starting point is the 1930s debate between Walter Lippmann and John Dewey on democracy. Johnson shares the latter’s concern with the public dissemination of social and political knowledge, which Dewey saw as one of the functions of a pragmatist science of politics. Johnson pays particular attention to the conditions under which social and political research is presented. He uses the example of the emergence of AIDS activism in the US during the mid-1980s, in which a pragmatist preoccupation with rendering the epidemic and its sources visible to the public could be discerned, to illustrate the claim that political scientists have much to gain from an increased awareness of the importance of the ways in which they presents their findings as well as themselves. The influence of Dewey’s political pragmatism is also to be found in Kenneth Stikkers’s paper, “Dewey, Economic Democracy, and the Mondragon Cooperatives”. The key insight here explored is the application of Deweyan radical democratic ideas to the economic sphere: human growth vs. economic growth; bottom-up, evolutionary economics versus ideological, utopian economics; empirical, experimental science versus ideology posing as “science”. But where can one find concrete applications of Dewey’s ideas in the economic sphere? Certainly not in the US, where the economy is largely dominated by the principles of autocratic corporate governance; Stikkers’s alternative was to turn to Europe in order to find an example of Deweyan economy. The example he finds is the Mondragon Cooperative Corporation, a network of largely worker cooperatives in the Basque region of Spain. The Mondragon, with its principles of workers as owners; owners as workers; democratic governance; reasonable wage differentials; distribution of profits according to a fixed formula; cooperation among cooperatives; distrust of state interference; profit is not an end in itself, but a means to securing employment and a better life for workers; environmental stewardship; and education for democratic economic life, provides an excellent example of Deweyan economy, although neither pragmatism generally nor Dewey in particular has influenced the shaping of that conglomerate. The last paper of this issue deals with the impact of pragmatist ideas upon an entirely different domain, psychiatry. David H. Brendel’s
“Can Patients And Psychiatrists Be Friends?: A Pragmatist Viewpoint” discusses how pragmatist ideas can help negotiate the tension between the psychiatrists and patients around the apparently but indeed central theme of friendship. The author’s “clinical pragmatism” is situated between modernist and postmodernist accounts of truth, action and pragmatism. The paper ends with an extension of the author’s early work concerning the contribution of pragmatism for good psychiatric practice. As such, this will be of interest to many outside humanities and the social sciences – and an added value to this issue.

The continued impact of pragmatist philosophical ideas in other areas of scientific inquiry, throughout the twentieth century in both sides of the Atlantic, is well illustrated in the various papers included here. From psychiatry to economics and political science, from psychology to sociology, there were numerous encounters between that philosophical tradition and other areas of social scientific research. Granted, there is room for improvement, as pragmatism never really attained the status of mainstream influence in any of those disciplines. Yet the past decade has been witness to a steady and consistent increase of the currency of pragmatist themes and ideas in various fields, in particular in Europe. It is with a note of optimism that we conclude this introduction and invite our readers to peruse into this issue as they will certainly find numerous motives of interest in the excellent pieces now brought to the public.
Section I. Pragmatism and the margins of mainstream social sciences
Peter Manicas

*American Social Science: The Irrelevance of Pragmatism*

Abstract. This essay rejects the idea that pragmatism and especially Dewey had an influence on the development of American social science. It is true and important that the disciplines of American social science were institutionalized during the same period as the work of the classical pragmatists, and that they responded to the increasingly dominant view of a proper view of science and its social role. But it is not difficult to show that they sketched alternative conceptions which utterly failed. Both Peirce and James explicitly rejected the prevailing positivism for all the right reasons and Dewey’s “instrumentalism” was a major step toward achieving an alternative to both positivism and realism. This is especially prominent in his direct critique of mainstream psychology and the social sciences.

Introduction

This essay argues that, contrary to a good deal of received opinion, the classical pragmatists, C.S. Peirce, William James and John Dewey, had almost no influence as regards the human sciences in the United States, and that in a stunning inversion, their distinct views were absorbed by the mainstream and employed to justify mainstream practices. Thus, for example, in her extremely well documented *The Origins of American Social Science* (1991), Dorothy Ross quite correctly characterizes American social science as “scientistic”. But she also argues that pragmatism and especially Dewey was a critical ally in the American construction of the social sciences.¹ The confusions here will take some unpacking.

Broadly, my argument is this: We need to see, first, that the idea of science cannot be taken for granted. Through the work of a host of late 19th century philosopher/physicists, a positivist conception, originally put forward in 1830 by August Comte, won out.\footnote{See D. Ross, *The Origins of American Social Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). She writes: “[Scientism] was the result of a long-standing commitment perennially deferred, an effort to make good on the positivist claim that only natural science provided certain knowledge and conferred the power of prediction and control. With science now defined by its method, scientism demanded that the requirements of natural scientific method dominate the practice of social science” (Ross, 1991: 390). She seems wrongly to assume that the positivists provide a generally correct understanding of natural science. As regards social science, Ross seems to favor interpretative models “available in history and cultural anthropology” or “the generalizing and interpretative model offered by Max Weber” (Ross, 1991: 473). I argued in *A History and Philosophy of the Social Sciences* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987) and in *A Realist Philosophy of Social Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) that there was a third, critical realist alternative. I suggest in what follows that James and Dewey seem to have stumbled toward this alternative, ambiguously realist, and emphatically neither positivist nor “interpretative”.} The confusions here will take some unpacking.

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powerfully fleshed out in the 1930s by Vienna logical empiricism and became hegemonic. The classical pragmatists were well aware of this historically critical development. Their pragmatisms were, indeed, self-conscious efforts to provide an alternative conception.

Second, since the disciplines of the human sciences are not natural kinds but are socially constructed by agents working with materials at hand, we need to provide at least a sketch of a sketch of this construction. Writing prior to World War I, Thorstein Veblen clearly understood what was going on. “Given the exigencies of competitive enterprise in America”, with “business men” as executives of the new universities, there was little choice but to reward those who enhanced the position of the university in the larger community. The result is “a ‘science’ of complaisant interpretations, apologies, and projected remedies” (1957: 136).

Third, after considering the views of Peirce and James against the background of then current understandings of science, I develop Dewey’s largely unacknowledged and frequently misunderstood criticism of the genesis of positivist academic psychology and social science.3

What is Science?

In what became a stunningly prophetic conception, Comte had provided a clear definition of positivism, the “stage” of mind which follows the “theological” and the “metaphysical”. First, following Kant, he insisted that “metaphysical” and “fictitious” ideas were no part of science. These included references to causes as productive powers, essences, first and final causes and non-observable “forces”. For the positivist, then, science is empirical in the sense that it deals with ideas that can be verified (or falsified) by appeal to experience. To be sure, there are problems in seeing exactly what counts as verifiability (falsifiability) – problems that have haunted all recent empiricist theories of science.

Second, Comte argued that we should give up the search for causes in exactly the sense that causes are productive powers. We should seek causes in Hume’s sense: that is, as “invariable relations of succession and resemblance”. On this view, we cannot observe (say) the productive power of opium or for that matter, of gravity. We see rather a constant relation of succession: if one takes opium, one sleeps. Bodies near earth fall at D = 16t^2.

Third, following on the foregoing and most critically, the explanation of facts is simply a deduction of an instance from general laws. Thus, on what is now called “the Deductive-Nomological” model, “explanation” and prediction (what Comte called “prevision”) are symmetrical: Having the law allows us to “explain” as well as to predict.

By the 1970s, every pillar of the positivist consensus among philosophers of science had come apart. See Manicas, A History and Philosophy of the Social Sciences, Chapter 12 for a summary. However, the defining features of this consensus, for example, the positivist account of explanation and causality, has, by virtue of institutionally inertia, hardly touched American social scientists. For evidence, see almost any textbook in social science. Indeed, contemporary economics, often considered the most mature of social sciences, is also the most unapologetically positivist.

These ideas lay more or less fallow until the last decades of the 19th century, when, with the advance of chemistry, the culmination of classical physics and the development of industrialized science, the precise nature of a genuine science became a critical problem, hotly debated by an eminent group of philosopher/physicists in Germany, France and England. G.R. Kirchhoff’s Principles of Mechanics (1874), Ernst Mach’s Science of Mechanics (1883), and Wilhelm Ostwald’s General Chemistry (1888) were among the first blasts toward establishing a stringently anti-metaphysical empiricist philosophy of science.⁴ These writers were joined by Ludwig Boltzmann and Heinrich Hertz in Germany, by Pierre Duhem and Henri Poincaré in France, and in England by W.K. Clifford and, following the path of Mach, by Karl Pearson. Thus, Mach and Duhem, took the deductivist view of explanation to its logical conclusion and held that science does not even try to explain; it only describes. Writing in 1906, Pierre Duhem offers that “to explain...is to strip reality of the appearances covering it like a veil, in order to see bare reality itself”, but this is metaphysics. For him, “A physical theory is not an explanation. It is a system of mathematical propositions deduced from a small number of mathematical principles, which aim to represent as simply, as completely, and as exactly as possible a set of experimental laws.”⁵ “Science”, now cleansed of “pre-scientific” metaphysics, could claim unchallengeable authority.

The Disciplinary Development of the Social Sciences

Unlike pears and porcupines, the disciplines of the social sciences are not “natural kinds”. They exist only by virtue of beliefs and practices created by historical agents working with materials at hand. And their social construction began in earnest in America only some one hundred years ago.⁶ The question of the nature of the human sciences remained open with at least four competing conceptions; a positivist view and three different contestations of positivism: a “Marxist” view originating with Engels, and the very different anti-positivisms of Dilthey and Weber.⁷ It is easy to show why, given the opportunity, the dis-

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⁵ P. Duhem, The Aim and Structure of Physical Theory [1906], (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954), 7, 19. Anti-positivists included, prominently, Hermann von Helmholtz, James Clerk Maxwell and J.J. Thomson. For example, Helmholtz insisted that “the word Ursache (which I use here precisely and literally) means that existing something [Bestehendes] which lies hidden behind the changes we perceive. It is the hidden but continually evident basis of phenomena” (Helmholtz, 1971: 521). See Peirce and James, below.
⁶ Much more complete sketches may be found in my A History and Philosophy of the Social Sciences and “The Social Science Disciplines: The American Model”, in B. Wittrock and P. Wagner (eds.), Yearbook Sociology of the Sciences (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1990). A still fuller account is to be found in Ross, Origins of American Social Science. For discussion of the different historical experiences of European social science, see Wagner, Peter, Wittrock. Bjorn, and Richard Whitely (eds.), Discourses on Society: The Shaping of the Social Science Disciplines, Sociology of the Science Yearbook, Vol. XV, (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991), especially, perhaps, the fine summary essay by Wagner and Wittrock, “States, Institutions, Discourses: A Comparative Perspective on the Structuration of the Social Sciences”, in Wagner et al. ibid., 331-358. The volume treats nineteenth century European differences well, but no effort was made to examine traditions elsewhere. Historically rooted differences remain in contemporary practices in European social science, e.g., in the absence of a separate faculty for the social sciences in France, or in the French admixture of neo-classical theory and engineering in economic science. A license degree in economics was not created until 1958.
⁷ Lenin clearly saw that the issues were important. In his too little studied Materialism and Empirio-criticism (1908) (Moscow: Progress Publishers), Lenin defended Engels’s materialism against those “bold warriors, who proudly allude to the ‘modern theory of knowledge’, ‘recent philosophy’ or ‘recent positivism’), the ‘philosophy of the natural sciences’ or even more boldly, ‘the philosophy of natural science of the twentieth century’” (Empirio-criticism, 7). Dilthey rejected totally the “philosophy of the natural sciences as pertinent for the human sciences. “Weber, of course, held that the need for verstehen critically distinguished the human or cultural sciences, but held also that these sciences aimed at causal explanation, understood in anti-Humean terms. See Manicas, A Realist Philosophy of Science (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), Chapter 5.
ciplines were constituted in positivist terms. Marxism was (and remains?) anathema in the Universities of the “Free World”; Dilthey and Weber were substantially unknown in the US and both did develop positions which rejected the “natural science” model understood as a positivism neither had the distinct advantages of the positivist image of natural science, in particular the authority which the mature natural sciences were then generating.

A persistent assumption of disciplinary histories of the social sciences is the idea that each of the main branches of today’s social sciences reflects at least reasonably firm strata of the social world. There is, thus, a “natural” division of labor that was finally realized with the maturation of the distinct social sciences. Explaining the emergence of the disciplines, then, takes the form of showing how pathfinders, interested in constituting analogues to the successful modern natural sciences, broke from the “prescientific” past and established restricted domains for controlled inquiry. Each story is different, of course, and some are stormier than others. Some, for example psychology, are even less settled than others.

I give here but a hint of the key moves and players. At least in broad terms, it is easy to identify the historical process which generated the beliefs and practices which constituted disciplinary social science. Two changes of enormous importance were critical to the American institutionalization of the social sciences. First were the new problems created by very rapid industrialization: immigration, urbanization and “the social problem.” Second, usually ignored, was the creation of the modern “research” University, an American innovation on German practice. Universities, of course, had existed in Europe for centuries, but as many observers have noted, “the true ancestor’s of today’s universities are certainly not their medieval precursors.” Similarly, America had “colleges” but the curriculum was “medieval” and culminated in “moral philosophy”, frequently taught by the President, who was often a cleric. There was no graduate curriculum. Sensitive to their backwardness, but even more sensitive to the potential new roles that a University could play, academic entrepreneurs, working closely with the Rockefellers, Carnegies and Vanderbilts, built what was needed. Shored up by carefully directed violence, racist politics could easily be joined to the politics of economic growth and, in turn, both could be joined to technocratic solutions—solutions to be provided by “experts” As Bledstein put it, “Americans lacked tradition as a source of authority, but they did “not lack ‘science’”.

Indeed, was social inquiry to be left to the “metaphysical philosophers”, the likes of Henry George, or to dilettantish reformers like Jane Addams or W.E.B. DuBois, or to irresponsible journalists, like Jacob Riis? Surely social problems were as amenable to scientific solutions as any other. And surely, if social scientists were to be professionals, they had to mark out their own scientific territory and establish their own system of credentialing. Academic departments, the PhD, professional associations and journals would provide exceptionally efficient means, then as now, for controlling the curriculum.

The first critical conceptual move was the divorce of history and the social sciences. This process, which required de-Germanization and de-historicism, was to take two generations beginning with creation of graduate programs in the social sciences, Columbia’s School of Political Science, established under John Burgess in 1880, and Herbert B.
Adams’s Graduate Program in Historical Studies at Hopkins. As regards Political Economy, America had a version of the *Methodenstreit*, between Richard Ely, inspired by the *Verein für Sozialpolitik*, and Simon Newcombe, an able and articulate spokesman for the abstract deductivist conception of political economy which Ricardo had inspired and which J.S. Mill had tried to restrict. John Bates Clark’s original integration of the new marginalism effectively “answered” the socialists and single-taxers and was an important part of the ideological battle which had to be fought. Veblen was on the other side, offering Peircean criticisms of the new marginalism. A consequence of the American battle over the nature of political economy, impelled by wholly independent institutional factors, was the opportunity provided to the “political scientists” to establish “government” as their domain and to Franklin H. Giddings and E.A. Ross, one of the first of Ely’s Wisconsin Ph.D.’s, to capture the residue under the heading of an autonomous scientific sociology.

Giddings, the founder of the Colombia School of Sociology, had been reading Mach and Pearson and was convinced by their arguments that in eschewing metaphysics, science was actually descriptive rather than explanatory. “All science knew was the description of concomitant and co-varying facts” (Quoted by Ross, 1991: 238). Accordingly, statistical methods were the “heart and soul of a scientific sociology”. Charles Merriam’s clarion call of 1921, “The Present State of the Study of Politics”, was even clearer in seeing the connection between positivist epistemology and Comte’s commitment to “prevision and control”. Thus, he writes that with a scientific politics which quantified data and identified “relations of variables”, it would be possible to have “a more intelligent control of the process of government” (Quoted by Somit and Tanenhaus, 1967: 11).

World War I was decisive in the victory of positivist social science. In a stunning consensus, American social scientists enthusiastically encouraged American entry into the war and then enthusiastically cooperated with the government in realizing America’s self-defined mission “to make the world safe for democracy”. For Anglo-Americans, the defeat of Germany represented, as well, the defeat of “metaphysical”, “statist”, historical and holistic German social science. Long suspicious of it in any case, the war proved to them that older British and French empirical philosophies, continuously represented in the “old” political economy and in British utilitarian theories of government, had been right all along.

Herbert Hoover’s 1929 gathering of a distinguished group of social scientists “to examine the feasibility of a national survey of social trends” well marks the beginnings of the contemporary vision of social science. Funded by the Rockefeller Foundation with the full support of the Social Science Research Council and the Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, four years of work by hundreds of inquirers resulted in “The Ogburn Report”, 1600 pages of quantitative research. Pitirim Sorokin, who had no problems with the appropriate use of statistics, observed:

In the future some thoughtful investigator will probably write a very illuminating study about these ‘quantitative obsessions’ …tell how such a belief became a vogue, how social investigators tried to ‘measure’ everything; how thousands of papers and research bulletins were filled with tables, figures, and coefficients; and how thousands of persons never intended for scientific investigation found in measurement and computation a substitute for real thought”.

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10 He explicitly attacked Karl Pearson and the anti-metaphysicians: “Those eminent authorities who speak for a colorless mathematical formulation invariably and necessarily fall back on the (essentially metaphysical) preconception of causation as soon as they go into the actual work of scientific inquiry” (Veblen, 1961: 15).

Thenceforth, “researchers” could produce many tons of “findings”, and there would be little danger that any of it would bear any “colour of iconoclasm”.

**Classical Pragmatism**

What of the pragmatists? By the turn of the century, it was clear to James, Veblen and Dewey that science was giving “its tone to modern culture”. But for them, the consequences were more than uncertain. The most well-known advocates of science, Spencer, Clifford, Huxley and others, were not only defending agnosticism and positivism, but a view in which science was to be immunized from the biases and interests of human communities. James, Veblen and Dewey were anything but enthusiastic about the situation as they saw it. Indeed, James’s criticisms hinged on ideas about the foundations of science which were completely novel, and Veblen and Dewey were clearest in seeing that science was being shaped by changes “in industry and in the economic organization of society”.

Science, pretender to transcendent authority, was becoming industrialized, technocratic.

David Hollinger has rightly argued that the critical role played by the pragmatists in American culture was “to find and articulate” a “way of life consistent with what they and their contemporaries variously perceived as the implications of modern science” (Hollinger, 1985: 93). It is widely held, by friends and enemies, that they succeeded. On this interpretation, the pragmatists adopted a view of science in which successful prediction and control vindicated inquiry. By subordinating all inquiry to “practical ends”, they could show that a belief was warranted only insofar as it was “scientific”. Finally, they could then vindicate a culture whose “social motor” was science. In what follows, I suggest that the foregoing interpretation is a stunning distortion and that the pragmatists failed utterly in their quest to set a new course for a “scientific” civilization. Not only were the forces at work resistant to their criticisms, but their fundamental insights, in a paradoxical inversion, became absorbed in distorted forms.

Peirce, James and Dewey sought a conception of philosophy which responded to the “scientism” of the dominating view of science. Peirce wrote before disciplinary social science was created and so we will not find anything from him on the topic. But he was fully aware of work of the philosophers/physicists who had articulately a powerful positivist conception of natural science. And did not like it. The focus here is on his views of the causal importance of the independently existing world of nature.

**Peirce’s Pragmatism**

As everyone knows, what came to be called “pragmatism” was first set out by Peirce in two remarkable essays published in *Popular Science Monthly* in 1877-78. In the first, “The Fixation of Belief”, he put forward his genuinely original “doubt-belief” theory of inquiry, what I shall take to be the core of “pragmatism”. Insisting that “that sole object of inquiry is the settlement of opinion” – not as the tradition had held, the securing of truth, and that “belief is of the nature of a habit”, he offered that of the possible modes of fixing belief, while all “do have their merits”, the method of science had, finally, to be the one we must chose, exactly because the method of science alone “presents any distinction of a right and a wrong way” (108-09). Its “fundamental hypothesis” is that there are real things, whose characters are entirely independent of our opinions about them; these realities affect our senses according to regular laws, and, though our sensations are as different as our relations to ob-
jects, yet, by taking advantage of the laws of perception, we can ascertain by reasoning how things really are (107-08).

Peirce cannot “prove” that there is something “which affects or might affect every [one]”, but “upon which our thinking has no effect”. Yet there is no reason that a genuine doubt should arise in the practice of the method; indeed, “nobody…can really doubt there are realities, or, if he did, doubt would not be a source of dissatisfaction” (Peirce, 1950: 108). We can know “how things really are” even if the effects of reality on us “are necessarily as various as are individual conditions”. We can because we can assume that there are “regular laws” involved in our transacting with “real things”. Finally, not only does “everybody use the method,” hesitating only when “he does not know when to apply it”, but “scientific investigation has had the most wonderful triumphs in the way of settling opinion” (108).

This enormously rich beginning was followed by “How to Make Our Ideas Clear”, the essay which contains Peirce’s famous “pragmatic maxim”.

Peirce illustrated his famous principle by asking if one could say of a diamond that had been crystalized in the midst of a cushion of cotton and had remained there until it was burned up, whether it was really hard? The issue was not merely whether unscratched diamonds are hard, but more generally, there was the question of that Reality which he had posited as so essential to the method of science. When Peirce applied his principle to the meaning of “the real”, he was led, as everyone knows, to assert that “the opinion which is fated to be ultimately agreed to by all who investigate is what we mean by the truth, and the object represented in this opinion is the real” (133). Against himself, he asked whether this was consistent with the definition given in his fixation essay? Did it not, in idealist fashion, make “the characters of the real depend upon what is ultimately thought about them”. He answered that “reality is independent, not necessarily of thought in general, but only of what you or I or any finite number of men may think about it” (133).

But if “the real” is to provide a constraint on current belief adequate for epistemic purposes, will this do? In The Monist of 1905, he returned to these problems. In the first of two essays, he made clear that “instead of merely jeering at metaphysics, like other propo- positivists, the pragmaticist extracts from it a precious essence, which will serve to give life to cosmology and physics” (Peirce, 1950: 192). This “precious essence” was his “scholastic realism” – and precious it indeed was. But if pragmatism was “prope-positivist”, what did this mean? Peirce was as emphatic about his scholastic realism as he was emphatic about what for him was the real novelty of the new pragmatic theory: “its recognition of an inseparable connection between rational cognition and rational purpose”, the connection which James will be so pleased to develop.

Whatever Peirce intended by his scholastic realism, it is clear enough that it is inconsistent with all the positivisms, Comte’s, Mill’s, Mach’s or later Vienna varieties. While for Peirce, there was a “non-experienceable reality” – in this he agreed with Kant – “there are real objects that are general, among the number being the modes of determination of existent singulars”. The article of 1878 had either glossed over this point as “unsuited” to the public there addressed or, he noted, “perhaps the author wavered in his own mind” (215). In that essay, he had written: “it would be merely a question of nomenclature whether that diamond should be said to have been hard or not”. This is, he now writes, no doubt true, “except for the abominable falsehood in the word ‘merely,’ implying that symbols are unreal”. “Nomenclature involves classification”, he continued, “and classification is true or false”. Thus, “the generals to which it refers are either reals…or figments” (215). In this case, the “generals” are real: There are diamonds and anything which is really a diamond is really
hard because being hard is an inseparable property of at least some of those other properties which make a diamond what it really is. It must be hard (219).

The point must not be missed. On positivist versions, laws of nature are construed as universal conditionals of the form (x) (Fx → Gx) where ‘→’ is “suitably” interpreted. That is, a law is construed as a contingent relationship between the extensions of its terms, “all F’s are G’s”. But on Peirce’s view of the matter, a law expresses a nomic relationship between properties, between F-ness and G-ness, properties to which we refer with corresponding abstract terms. The reality of the diamond is expressed in the truth of “general conditional propositions”, but these are not construed in a Humean fashion, for as Peirce saw (and Kant before him), on such a view, science is not possible.

In an unpublished manuscript, “Laws of Nature and Hume” (1901), Peirce’s criticism of Hume (and the Humeans) is decisive. He writes:

...we do not say that the alternation of day and night is necessary, because it depends upon the circumstance that the earth continually rotates. But we do say that by virtue of gravity every body near the surface of the earth must be continually receiving a component downward acceleration...Nor do Hume or his followers dream of denying that. But what they mean when they say there is not “necessity” in gravitation is that every “event” which gravitation formulates is in reality totally independent of every other; just as Hume supposes the different instances of induction to be independent “evidences”. One stone’s falling has no real connection with another’s fall...The objection to Hume’s conception of a Law of Nature is that it supposes the universe to be utterly unintelligible, while, in truth, the only warrant for any hypothesis must be that it renders phenomena intelligible (Peirce, 1950: 310).

Science needs real connectedness; but such connectedness is not the product of constitutive features of the mind, as Kant had it. Connectedness is in the mind-independent world. It is thus that for Peirce, there are “objective possibilities”, unactualized, but real. And thus also that for Peirce’s pragmatism, intelligibility, not prediction is the only warrant for a hypothesis.

James’ Psychology and Philosophy of Science

James’s Principles is perhaps one of the two or three greatest books in the history of psychology. Yet contrary to the conventional wisdom, it had practically no influence on the development of American psychology.12 We can notice, first, that Principles was published when the subject-matter and method of psychology as a science were still very much unsettled (Manicas, 1987, Chapter 9).

James offered, modestly and misleadingly, that the originality of his Principles consisted in its “strictly positivist [scientific!] – ] point of view” (James, 1981, Vol. 1: 6). It is important first to see what James did not mean by this. Indeed, James’s critical realist understanding of science, like Peirce’s, stands in direct opposition to the positivist philosophy of science then so powerfully in vogue.

He was clear that the results of scientific inquiry were in no way the “immediate results of experience” nor were “scientific objects” restricted to what is found in experience. Thus, “the essence of things for science is not to be what they seem, but to be atoms and mole-

12 For a fuller account, see Manicas, Journal for the Theory of Social Behavior, Vol. 32, No. 3 (September, 2002). Owen Flanagan Jr. has provided a reading of Principles along the lines of an non-reductive neuropsychology in his The Science of the Mind (Cambridge, Ma.: MIT press, 1984).
molecules moving to and from each other according to strange laws…What we experience, what comes before us, is a chaos of fragmentary impressions interrupting each other; what we think is an abstract system of hypothetical data and laws” (1981, Vol. II: 1230-31).

Plainly, we do something with “what comes before us”. But there are two aspects of this. There is first what we all do if we are to have coherent experience, if we are to convert “the chaos of fragmentary impressions” to a grasp of the “habitudes of concrete things”. The grasp of these, the “proximate laws of nature”, for example, that heat melts ice and salt preserves meat, form “an enormous part of human wisdom”. These “empirical truths” are “practical”. Indeed, they are indispensable to the continued reproduction of human communities. In James’s view, getting an understanding of how we come to have such knowledge was the first problem for a scientific psychology. But there is, as well, what as scientists we do: The effort to explain these “proximate laws” by means of theories which, for example, speak of polimerization or gravitation. For James, following Peirce, such theories have an entirely different aim and ground. “The popular notion that ‘Science’ is forced on the mind ab extra, and that our interests have nothing to do with its constructions, is utterly absurd”. But James emphatically denied that the “interest” which generates science is “practical”. Picking up a theme he had advanced in “The Sentiment of Rationality”, he insisted that “the craving to believe that the things of the world belong to kinds which are related by an inward rationality together, is the parent of Science as well as of sentimental philosophy”. Moreover, “the original investigator always preserves a healthy sense of how plastic the materials are in his hands” (1260).

Scientific inquiry might yield technologies, but James was clear that this was neither its motivation nor its vindication, a point made by Peirce that Veblen put to such good work in his “The Place of Science in Modern Civilization”. In contrast to the “proximate laws of nature”, scientific theories have to harmonize with the “proximate laws of nature”, yet they are tested not in the course of everyday experience, but in “artificial experiments in the laboratory”. James seems to see that, in order to set up an experiment, we need to “conjecture” that there is some unobservable mechanism whose processes have predicted effects. We contrive the experiment, then, so as to eliminate conditions that, in uncontrolled common experience, would interfere with its un-complicated operation. That is, uncritical “experience”, in Baconian fashion, does not “engender” the “inner relations”. Rather, in experimentation, we generate experiences which give us evidence of the reality postulated by the theory.

Accordingly, what is pertinent to defining success will differ as well. Practical purposes offer practical tests; the interests of theoretic rationality, the “constructions” which bring “a strong feeling of ease, peace, rest”, the “lively relief” which comes with “rational comprehension”, answer to “the aesthetic Principle of Ease” (James, 1978: 35), what Veblen termed, “the test of dramatic consistency”. This is hardly an expression of the crude “cash value” pragmatism so frequently attributed to James and more generally to pragmatism!

In Principles, James’s selected example is a long text from Helmholtz’s Die Erhaltung der Kraft. Helmholtz had it right:

Theoretical science tries to discover the unknown causes of processes from their visible effects; tries to understand them by the law of causality…The ultimate goal of theoretical physics is to find the last unchanging causes of the processes of nature (1981, II: 1261).

To be sure, James gave this a novel twist: “What makes the assumption [of unchanging causes] ‘scientific’ and not merely poetic, what makes a Helmholtz and his kin discoverers,
is that the things of Nature turn out to act as if they were of the kind assumed” (1261). Over metaphysics, aesthetics and moral philosophy, science has an advantage:

"...Though nature’s materials lend themselves slowly and discouragingly to our translation of them into ethical forms; but more readily into aesthetic forms; to translation into scientif-ic forms they lend themselves with relative ease and completeness. The translation, it is true, will probably never be ended. The perceptive order does not give way, nor the right conceptive substitute for it arise at our bare word of command. It is often a deadly fight. (1981, II: 1236)

This is perhaps the basis of James’s most profound ethical claim, repeated in many different formulations, that “the inmost nature of reality is congenial to powers which [we] possess”. Moreover, saying that “the translation…will probably never be ended” suggests that James would reject, as I think he should, the Peircean notion that in the end, there will be some one true “description” that is the product of persistent inquiry. Indeed, this would seem to be the case, as well, as regards ethical and aesthetic matters. Yet, the belief that there are “atoms and molecules moving to and from each other according to strange laws” is a belief about the nature of a hidden reality. Indeed, in his notes for the 1879 “The Sentiment of Rationality”, there is a brilliant argument for the pragmatic pertinence of the idea of a non-experienceable reality. James says:

The principle of “pragmatism” which allows for all assumptions to be of identical value so long as they equally save the appearances will of course be satisfied by this empiricist explanation…[viz., as according to Mill, that no mysterious “outness” needs to be postu-lated]. But common sense is not assuaged. She says, yes, I get all the particulars, am cheated out of none of my expectations. And yet the principle of intelligibility is gone. Real outness makes everything simple as the day, but the troops of ideas marching and falling perpetually into order, which you now ask me to adopt, have no reason in them – their whole existence is de facto and not de jure (James, 1978: 374).

Nevertheless, if British phenomenalism did not suffice, neither could he accept a “more” beyond the actual as it functioned in Spencer and Kant. Appealing to Peirce’s arguments, he first notes that “most scientific readers of Spencer wholly fail to catch the de-stuctive import of his theory…They are willing to believe with the Master that the deepest reality is the absolutely irrational, because that reality is unknowable, but few of them ultimately realize that the knowable of their philosophy forms a world of Chance pure and simple” (James 1978: 369). Spencer’s “unknowable” cannot function to give order, since to do this it must be known to have properties which could explain the orderliness of expe-rience. It was thus that the “plus ultra in many philosophies – in Mr Spencer’s and in Kant’s e.g., the noumenon is a dog in the manger, it does nothing for us itself but merely stands and blasts with its breath the actual” (371).

James was haunted by the apparent intractability of making sense of a relation between “outer” and “inner”, between mental facts and facts in the world independent of mind. At this point at least, none of the inherited forms of phenomenalism would suffice, even if with it he would later change his mind. James agreed here with Peirce that the real could not be reduced to the actual: “There are still other forces at work in the mind which lead it to sup-pose something over and above the mere actuality of things”. These include “the sense of futurity, the power of expectation” and our moral judgments, which “also involve [...] the
notion of something related to the instant representation and yet lying beyond its mere actuality” (369-70).

The “Sentiment of Rationality” is important in another way. In holding that “conceptions, ‘kinds’ are teleological instruments”, serving the needs of “theoretic rationality”, he hinted at an utterly novel solution to some age-old problems, problems given a full-blown naturalistic treatment in Principles. On this view, classification, judging and predicating presuppose “a rather intricate system of necessary and immutable ideal truths of comparison”. The “empiricists” are wrong in supposing that necessary truths are merely the result of “experience” or as Spencer had it, of “mere paths of ‘frequent’ association which outer stimuli ...ploughed” into the brain. But the apriorists are also wrong since the “eternal verities” which “our mind lays hold of do not necessarily themselves lay hold on extra-mental being, nor have they, as Kant pretended later, a legislating character even for all possible experience”. Rooted “in the inner forces which make the brain grow”, and therefore not transcendental, they can be given a wholly naturalistic explanation. Moreover, psychology shows that classification is functional in the sense that essential attributes are nothing more than abstracted properties which serve inference.

Yet it is critical to see also that James’s “pragmatic” account presupposes – as he sees – that there are relatively enduring “things”, that “the world” which is independent of mind is not Heraclitean: “This world might be a world in which all things differed, and in which what properties there were ultimate and had not farther predicates”. Fortunately, our world “plays right into logic’s hands. Some of the things...are of the same kind as other things; some of them remain always of the kind which they once were; and some of the properties of them cohere indissolubly and are always found together” (James, 1981, II: 1246-47). That is, as Peirce had insisted, the “objects” of the external world have some “character” or other, even though they need not be self-identifying to be cognized. If they are not self-identifying, however, the way they got identified can be largely a function of human purposes, generically understood. H2O is not “more deeply and truly” the essence of water than it is “a solvent of sugar or a slaker of thirst” – since, as Dewey would later insist, “it is all of these things with equal reality” (James, 1981, II: 961, note). Still, for scientific purposes, H2O is primary, exactly because the scientific interest is “the interest of theoretic rationality”.

The foregoing shows, I believe, that James offered a powerful philosophy of science which was not vulnerable to the difficulties in Peirce’s more speculative view. And it was not a positivism: “All ages have their intellectual populace. That of our own day prides itself particularly on its love of Science and Facts and its contempt for all metaphysics” (1978: 56). Positivists fool themselves if they suppose that they dispense with metaphysics. Indeed, “Metaphysics of some sort there must be. The only alternative is between the good Metaphysics of clear-headed Philosophy and the trashy Metaphysics of vulgar Positivism.
“(57). James’s philosophy of science in many ways akin to contemporary critical realism, was no “trashy metaphysics of vulgar Positivism”13.

But James believed that his Principles had failed to solve the mystery of knowing (James, 1894), and, remarkably, after struggling for some twelve years to write his great book, James concluded that it was “a loathsome, distended, tumified, bloated dropsical mass, testifying to nothing but two facts: 1st, that there is no such thing as a science of psychology, and 2nd, that W.J. is an incapable”14.

We must dismiss James’s self-deprecation. But could he be right: There is no such thing as a science of psychology? This was, be sure, the last thing that the heirs of Wundt, the functionalists and behaviorists wanted to hear. The long-lived Dewey was at the founding of disciplinary psychology, but unlike James, he was in continuous dialogue with what it was to become. After Watson, Dewey seems to have lost all hope that psychology could become what he had hoped for. Indeed, he would find what he had hoped for in his Logic.

Dewey and the Origins of American Psychology

One of Dewey’s earliest essays was an examination of “The New Psychology” (Dewey 1884). Historians agree that “the new psychology” derived from Wilhelm Wundt who founded the first psychological laboratory in 1879 and whose Grundzüge der physiologische Psychologie (1st Edition, 1873) was an enormous success. But Wundt’s psychology was complicated and offered many not always clearly consistent strands. But, according to Dewey, advances in the biological sciences have had another direct effect on the new psychology:

To biology is due the conception of organism…In psychology this conception has led to the recognition of mental life as an organic unitary process developing according to the laws of all life, and not a theater for the exhibition of independent autonomous faculties, or a rendezvous in which isolated, atomic sensations and ideas may gather, hold external converse and then forever part (EW: 1: 56).

This, of course, is directed at British-style associationist psychology, but as part of this, Dewey, still the Hegelian, endorses an ecological conception and the Wundtian premise that mind is social. Thus, “the idea of environment is a necessity to the idea of organism, and with the conception of environment comes the impossibility of considering psychical life as an individual, isolated thing, developing in vacuum” (ibid.).

But there is more. As a “movement”, the new psychology has certain general features: “The chief characteristic distinguishing it from the old psychology is undoubtedly the rejection of a formal logic as a method and test. The old psychologists almost without exception held to a nominalist logic” (58), a pronounced tendency, especially among those “who proclaimed that ‘experience’ was the sole source of all knowledge” (59). Hume destroyed all relations except as “accidents” and “denied all universality”. But he did this on the basis of “purely logical models”, “abstract principles of difference and identity…put in the guise of psychological expression”. The reaction to this, as in Kant, was to “fall back on certain

13 The failure to see the novelty and power of the philosophy of science found in his Principles is partly explained by his self criticism of psychology as a science (below), and, subsequently, by the overwhelming attention given his later philosophy, especially, of course, his popular Pragmatism and Essays in Radical Empiricism.

ultimate, indecomposable, necessary first truths immediately known through some mysterious faculty of mind...Such intuitions are not psychological; they are conceptions bodily imported from the logical sphere” (ibid.). These criticisms of the prevailing alternatives are, of course, familiar Deweyan themes, and indeed, they hold against a wide variety of empiricisms from Quine to contemporary AI theory.

Dewey’s hopes for “the new psychology” were not restricted to psychology only; he believed that it held enormous promise for philosophy itself. To be sure, not any psychology will do. Dewey’s first effort was his 1886 Psychology, published four years before James’s Principles of Psychology. Dewey intended the book to be an introductory text in psychology, but wanted also that it be an introduction to philosophy. In “Kant and Philosophic Method” (Dewey 1884), Dewey challenged the “method of ‘intellectualism’ begun by Descartes” (EW: 1: 34) and he argued, as before, that Humeans, avowedly empirical, distorted experience. Kant’s attempted repair had failed:

Though the categories make experience, they make it out of foreign material...They constitute objects, but these objects are not such in universal reference, but only to beings of like capacities of receptivity as ourselves. They respect not existence in itself, but ourselves as affected by that existence (39).

Again, “the only conception adequate to experience as a whole is organism”, a conception which Dewey found in Hegel’s Logic (42, 43).

Before the century ended, Dewey did become uncomfortable with his Hegelianism, abandoning it for the variety of naturalism which now so strongly identifies him, but it is essential to see that while he abandoned Hegel and psychology, he never did abandon the seminal psychological insights that his Hegelianism afforded.

**Pragmatism and Functionalism**

In all the standard histories, “functionalism”, the distinctive American psychology, figures heavily in subsequent development. Moreover, the “pragmatists” figure heavily in the development of “functionalism,” from its beginnings in Chicago to its variant forms elsewhere. In these histories, the path from “functionalism” to “behaviorism” is less clear, even if Dewey, as the mentor to Angell, Watson’s dissertation supervisor and the premier functionalist, remains in the fuzzy background. Returning in 1950 to his remarkable 1929 History, Boring could note that “Watson was a functionalist (with a small f) but he could not tolerate for long the requirement of the Chicago school that even the animal psychologist must take time to translate (sic) positively observed behavior into the vague terms of an inferred consciousness” (1950: 641). Indeed, with this not so subtle erasure of differences between pragmatism and positivism, Boring could conclude that “[operationism] was there all along”, recognized well before Percy Bridgman and Vienna positivism as an “advance” by American psychologists (1950: 656).

With Watson’s behaviorism, scientific psychology had not only expunged all talk of “consciousness”, but indeed had become a technocratic science of prediction and control. Considering the stereotypes of American pragmatism, its talk of the “cash value” of ideas, and Dewey’s association with Progressive political and social theory, it is easy to understand his taken-for-granted role in this development, especially when his 1896 essay, “The Reflex Arc Concept in Psychology” is taken, remarkably, to be “one of the most important arguments for the functional attitude toward the interactions (sic) between stimulus and re-
sponse” (Hilgard, 1987: 81) and, even more remarkably, when we notice that in 1943, this paper “was chosen as one of the most important articles ever published in Psychological Review” (Leahy, 1992: 282).

**Dewey’s 1896 Essay on the Reflex Arc**

But the critical point is the failure to recognize the philosophical background and fundamental point of Dewey’s famous essay on the reflex arc. It is true and important to recognize that between perhaps 1891 and 1903, with the Studies in Logical Theory, Dewey had made a conversion to his distinctive version of naturalism. But it is equally true and important that this was a naturalism that carried a huge Hegelian residue. Flower and Murphey say it well:

> It is almost as if Dewey held off from naturalism until he should be able to integrate with it those aspects of idealism which he regarded as philosophically important: the view of knowledge as organic and relational, the social character of both self and knowledge, the unifying and purposive character of judgment. Dewey could not bring together those features with naturalism as long as the dominant model of the latter was atomistic…(Flower and Murphey, 1977: 820).

This is was precisely the burden of the reflex arc essay. Dewey acknowledged that “the idea of a reflex arc has upon the whole come nearer to meeting the demand for a general working hypothesis than any other concept” (EW 5: 96) and his essay is not intended “to make a plea for what it replaced”. But the new account, best intentions notwithstanding, suffered from all the features of the older account. “The dualism between sensation and idea is repeated in the current dualism of peripheral and central structures and functions; the older dualism of body and soul finds a distinct echo in the current dualism of stimulus and response” (ibid.). Thus, “the sensory stimulus is one thing, the central activity, standing for the idea, is another thing, and the motor discharge, standing for the act proper, is a third”. But if so, is it impossible to see how action can be thought-guided or how we can learn? Experience shows not only that we do, but also what is amiss: the reflex arc is not “a patchwork of disjointed parts, a mechanical conjunction of unallied processes”. It was not to be understood “mechanically” but “functionally”. Rather, it is “a comprehensive or organic unity” (EW 5: 97). Dewey could now reject mechanism and atomism from a fully naturalistic point of view.

While for Dewey intentionality is a fundamental feature of all learning, he surely has not given us any account that provides the mechanisms for this. It will surely be a messy psychology including as it does a revisioning of the role and relationships of all the critical elements. But it is a naturalistic program which rejects all the mainstream versions of psychology.\(^\text{15}\)

**“Scientism” and “Scientific Psychology”**

In the ensuing years, “stimulus” will be employed to suit nearly any purpose, from a physical input or physiological event to, incoherently, “a situation or an involved object

\(^{15}\) In “John Dewey and American Psychology,” I argue that Dewey’s reflex arc essay is the point of departure of a unique approach to what I term an “ecological psychology”. It is another unfulfilled Deweyan program which anticipates fatal criticisms of much recent “cognitive psychology”.
with meaning encrusted on it” (Boring, 1929: 586). All of this, to be sure, was “scientific” defined exactly in positivist terms. Thus, propelled and legitimated by the wedding of traditional Humean empiricism and the extensionalist logic of Principia Mathematica, logical positivism could vindicate the so-called “Age of Theory”. With “intervening variables” and hypothetical constructs, S-R psychology could even offer gestures in the way of central processes. It seems unlikely that those who judged Dewey’s reflex-arc essay to be one of “the most important articles ever published in Psychological Review” could have understood Dewey’s paper. We can note also that Watson fully admitted being perplexed by Dewey. Although he had been drawn to Chicago to study with Dewey, in his autobiography Watson wrote: “I never knew what he was talking about then, and unfortunately for me, I still don’t know” (cited by Fancher, 1979: 316). Indeed, the example attests, by this time, to the hegemonic standing of logical empiricism among “scientific” true believers!

After the mid 1890s, Dewey wrote nearly nothing that could be said to find a place in the emerging discipline of American psychology. Several reviews give us some additional insight into why this was so. His 1898 review of Baldwin’s Social and Ethical Interpretations of Mental Development, offers a critical distinction: between examining the individual from the standpoint of psychical process and determining what of this is social, and examining not the process but the content of the individual’s experience to discover what this has in common with others (EW 5: 385-386). For Dewey, the first belongs to psychology, the second to sociology. Baldwin confuses these question because he falls into a trap: Both “the individual” and “the society” are taken as given. Accordingly, “when we want to know about the individual we are referred to society; when we want to know about society we are referred to the individual” (388).

Dewey should not have been disappointed. Indeed, just three years earlier, in a paper read at a joint session of the American Philosophical and American Psychological Associations on “The Standpoint and Method of Psychology”, he expressed fears about the direction of “the behavioristic movement”. It was quite one thing to throw out “consciousness” as private and open only to introspection. It was quite another thing to throw out “mind” in the sense just noted. “To conceive behavior exclusively in terms of the changes ongoing on within an organism physically separate in space from other organisms is to continue that conception of mind which Professor Perry has well termed, ‘subcutaneous’” (MW 7: 54). His criticisms paralleled those made against S-R psychology: “In so far as behaviorists tend to ignore the social qualities of behavior, they are perpetuating exactly the tradition against which they are nominally protesting” (54).

**Dewey and Academic Social Science**

Dewey said very little about the social sciences and although one finds throughout the corpus, references to science, one finds little in the way of a systematic account of science. Most of the terms descriptive of science and in general use were – and are – vague and uncritically employed: for example, cause, law, theory, explanation and experimental method. Dewey, like most writers today, could take these terms for granted even if, as I would insist, one can get contradictory conceptions of science from different analyses of them. This unclarity should not surprise us. What we now think of as an important sub-discipline of philosophy, philosophy of science, emerged only in the 1950s and it is only in the 1970s that there has been a genuine competitor to the positivist interpretation of science.

*Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*, published in 1938, is surely the main exception to the overall absence of texts on Dewey’s theory of science. What is there is very important, but
there are many important questions which Dewey did not address and, typically, he does not make effort to place his work in the context of other writers on science, Vienna positivism, for example. When the *Logic* was published, as Ralph Sleeper has argued, it was both ignored and misunderstood, so thoroughgoing were entrenched assumptions about logic and science. Moreover, by this time, systematic misunderstanding of Dewey was also well-entrenched. Accordingly, it was not then, and is not now, a genuine competitor for the received views of logic and science.

**Dewey’s Rejection of the Epistemological Problem**

Modern philosophy, responding to the new science, has been haunted by “the epistemological problem”, the problem of justifying true belief. Dewey, following Peirce and James, rejected the assumptions which generated the problem, a defining feature of pragmatism. Thus, inquiry begins with genuine doubt and ends when doubt has been overcome. In every case, whether in the sciences or the problem solving of ordinary life, the settling of belief begins with a clear definition of the concrete problem, an assembling of all the materials, intellectual and material, and then action which either settles the doubt or does not. Dewey’s philosophy is a praxis philosophy in just this sense. Failure to see this has misled many otherwise astute commentators. Dorothy Ross, for example, singles out Dewey’s (1897) lecture, “The Significance of the Problem of Knowledge” as a critical intervention on the side of the technocrats. But this is far from being the case: Its thrust is against traditional foundationist epistemology: rationalist, sensationalist and Kantian. Dewey writes:

> Knowledge can define the percept and elaborate the concept, but their union can be found only in action. The experimental method of modern science, its erection into the ultimate mode of verification, is simply this fact obtaining recognition (EW 5: 21).

Contrary to the epistemologists, there is no problem of knowledge in general: philosophy is “not an original fountainhead of truth”. And this means that for answers to questions about how knowledge is possible we need to look to psychology and social ethics – “including in the latter term all the related concrete social sciences, so far as they may give guidance to conduct” (EW 5: 22). Dewey’s project was to naturalize epistemology and moral theory.

The sociologist, like the psychologist, often presents himself as a camp follower of genuine science and philosophy, picking up scraps here and there and piecing them together in somewhat aimless fashion...But social ethics represents the attempt to translate philosophy from a general and therefore abstract method into a working and specific method; it is the change from inquiring into the nature of value in general to an inquiry of the particular values which ought to be realized in the life of everyone, and of the conditions which shall render possible this realization (EW 5: 23).

This is a stunning research program for social science, stunningly ignored. We need to be clear about this. Dewey believed, rightly, that human sciences could help us to understand ourselves: how we think and inquire and why, when thinking and inquiry is successful, it is successful. They would give us insight into what were our genuine interests and purposes and their relations, and most obviously, they would give us an understanding of the obstacles in present arrangements that keep us from realizing our genuine interests and purposes. The human sciences would be a “social motor”, emancipating in exactly the sense
that they would clear away misconceptions about ourselves and our arrangements and empower us to reconstruct the social world more in accordance with our wants and aims.

Central to this project was the rejection of the bifurcation of fact and value, a further consequence of the mistaken assumptions that had generated “the epistemological problem”. In his Logic, Dewey argued that “most current social inquiry” was marked by “the separation of theory and practice” (LW 12: 487). It is sound principle, Dewey says, that one should avoid making social judgments “on the ground of moral preconceptions, conceptions of what is right and wrong, vicious and virtuous” (LW 12: 489). But this is mistakenly converted to the principle that one should make no evaluations about ends. But “only recognition in both theory and practice that ends to be attained (ends-in-view) are of the nature of hypotheses and that hypotheses have to be formed and tested in strict correlativity with existential conditions as means, can alter current habits of dealing with social issues” (LW 12: 491).

Moreover, it is easy to assume that “the problems which exist are already definite in their main features”. The result is that “methods for resolving problematic situations are proposed without any clear conception of the material in which projects are to be applied and to take effect”, with often a worsening of the situation which generated the inquiry (LW 12: 487). The analogy between current modes of inquiry in social science and pre-scientific medicine was apt. As Dewey noted elsewhere, such practice was a combination of empiricism and quackery: Without analysis, symptoms were responded to in terms of handed down remedies. Of course, these sometimes worked. But as regards medicine at least, “it is now recognized that choice of remedial measures looking to restoration of health is haphazard until the conditions which constitute the trouble or disease have been determined as completely and accurately as possible” (LW 12: 488).

The self-imposed constraints of “allegedly scientific social inquiry” also explains the positivist penchant for “fact-gathering”. Dewey had attacked this idea in his 1931 essay, “Social Science and Social Control”. Dewey offered that “the existing limitations of ‘social science’ (Dewey’s quotation marks) are due mainly to unreasoning devotion to physical science as a model, and to a misconception of physical science at that” (LW, 6: 64). In the Logic, Dewey held that methods adopted “in the professed name of social science” are merely the form of genuine science since they fail “to observe the logical conditions which in physical science give the techniques of observing and measuring their standing and force” (LW 12: 492). There are many places where Dewey assessed current social science as deficient. In this essay (as in the Logic), Dewey held: “[T]he facts of social ‘fact-finding’ remain a miscellaneous pile of meaningless items”. “Since their connections with human wants and their effect on human values are neglected, there is nothing which binds them together into an intelligible whole” (LW 6: 65).

Indeed, in a related section of the Logic, Dewey developed an argument that C.W. Mills will pick up in his 1959 Sociological Imagination. Dewey saw two one-sided distortions. The “positivist” school (his term!) singlemindedly directs itself as “fact-finding” – what Mills had called “abstracted empiricism”. But the opposing tendency “places its entire emphasis on conceptions” (LW 12: 497) – what Mills called “Grand Theory”. As with Mills, “facts are subsumed directly under ‘principles’, the latter being regarded as fixed norms that decide the legitimacy or illegitimacy of existing phenomena and that prescribe the end toward which endeavor should be directed” (497).
**Instrumentalism and Science**

Dewey’s commitments to scientific method, his persistent attacks on inquiry detached from human concerns and his extensive use of technological metaphors have caused enormous confusion, but Hickman wisely glosses Dewey’s “instrumentalism” by arguing that “Dewey goes beyond theory and beyond praxis to production: his concern is with the making and testing of new entities including extra-organic tools as well as goals and ideals” (LW 12: 15). “Science” in this sense is a more refined and developed form of all inquiry. Thus, in the *Logic*, Dewey insists that “there is no sharp dividing line between common sense and science. “Control” – as Hickman says, a synonym for knowledge – does not refer to the subordination or domination of something. Rather, as Dewey makes clear enough, “control” refers to our capacity to apply intelligence successfully: to produce, adjust, accommodate, achieve, institute, identify, order, discriminate, and to “resolve” problems in many other sorts of ways. “Control” has been achieved when the problem which generated inquiry has been resolved.

It is in this sense, also, that “practical” must be understood. These “technical processes and instrumentalities” then become “the background of materials and operations which we term science” (LW 12: 77). And, indeed,

Genuine scientific knowledge revived when inquiry adopted as part of its own procedure and for its own purpose the previously disregarded instrumentalities and procedures of productive workers. This adoption is the radical characteristic of the experimental method of science (LW 12: 388-389).

But this does entail a collapse of science into technology in the sense that all inquiry has some immediate practical aim and surely not in the sense that we can and should seek to dominate nature. All knowing is technological in the sense that if the problematic situation is to be brought under “control”, language, mathematics and/or artifacts of various kinds are required. Indeed, more generally, this is consequence of Dewey’s attack on the “spectator theory of knowledge”. But the difference between science and common sense is exactly that while commonsense inquiry “occurs for the sake of settlement of some issue of use and enjoyment”, scientific inquiry occurs “for its own sake” (LW 12: 66-67.)

Dewey’s position here is almost always overlooked. Dewey did not reject the (Greek) idea that inquiry could be aimed solely at understanding. He rejected the bifurcation of theory and practice, the idea that one could understand anything without “tools” and without “experimental operations, involving definite techniques” (LW 12: 151, 420, 455). We need here to notice that the continuity between science and commonsense creates a very special burden for social science. Cultural conditions impact all inquiry – a critical point for an anti-positivist sociology of science, but because “the physical” is “relatively independent of social issues”, “the influence of cultural conditions” is “indirect”. For example, “it is not possible...to separate nineteenth century devotion to exclusively mechanical conceptions from the needs of industry of that period”. In social science, by contrast, “prejudices of race, nationality, class and sect play such an important role that their influence is seen by any observer of the field” (LW 12: 482). For Dewey, as for contemporary anti-positivists, this called for a self-conscience reflexivity.
**Scientific Laws and Causality**

Critical to any understanding of science is the conception of law and causality. First, Dewey rejected the most characteristic, even defining features of empiricist philosophy of science: that "scientific laws are formulations of uniform and unconditional sequences of events", and that causality must be defined in terms of such sequences (LW 12: 437). Of all the doctrines which currently inform mainstream social science, these are surely the most pernicious. Once accepted, we are committed to an event ontology and a regularity determinist view of the universe: Whenever this, then that. It is then also easy to assume a covering law model of explanation, and thus to hold also that prediction and explanation are symmetrical. One final consequence is the inability to conceptualize agency: the fact that persons make things happen. But as Dewey rightly sees, “there are no such things as uniform sequences of events” (LW 12: 445).

Second, he argued that “atoms and molecules show a selective bias in their indifference, affinities and repulsions to other events” (LW 12: 162). These “selective biases”, he says, define their “essence”, a term Dewey used without prejudicing his fully processual view of the universe. But since on a realist view, the “things” of the universe are always related to other “things”, outcomes are never guaranteed. Thus, “iron as such exhibits characteristics of bias or selective reactions”, but “iron as a genuine constituent of an organized body acts so as to end to maintain the type of activity of the organism to which it belongs” (LW 12: 195). In a living organism, it functions not to produce iron-oxide – as it would in a hinge – but to contribute to metabolism.

Moreover such moves are quite consistent with his idea that commonsense inquiry is continuous with advanced science. Dewey gives some examples: “A good rain will cause the seeds that have been planted to grow”. The expectations are “explained” by the unscientific person by attributing a power to rain. The empiricist disallows this, but content with an effort to establish the validity of the expectations, he does not seek to understand the “power”. The scientific problem is not, as positivists would have it, to close the system in order to make better predictions. Rather the scientific problem is to identify what is about the nature of water and of seeds such that a good rain will (ceteris paribus) cause the seeds to grow. One needs a theory about pertinent causal mechanisms, not a better analysis of the “variables”.

For example, Ross (1991: 253) holds that Dewey’s “Psychology and Social Practice” is another place where he endorses technocracy. Dewey argues that the teacher has a psychological theory, like it or not. “Teachers tell you that a child is careless or inattentive in the same final way that they would tell you that a piece of paper is white”. But, insists Dewey, it is only through some recognition of attention as a mechanism, some awareness of the interplay of sensations, images and motor impulses which constitute it as an objective fact that the teacher can deal effectively with attention as a function” (139).

Dewey’s point is exactly that unless teachers have an understanding of the student as a psycho-social being, all their efforts are bound to be misdirected, ineffective, even destructive. It is only by understanding the psychological “mechanisms” of attention, memory, cognition and judgment and the social “mechanisms” implicated in all experience and behavior that the teacher can cultivate the powers of the student. This is for Dewey a research program to be satisfied. We are, he says, discussing the question of the role of psychological science in education only because “we have as yet made so little headway” (144).

Dewey’s use of the term “mechanisms” here is notable and suggests how far he is from a regularity determinist view. This is made even clearer in a 1918 essay entitled “A New Social Science”, one of the very few places where Dewey explicitly discusses social
Dewey acknowledged radical contingency in the universe, a universe which was both “precarious and stable”. There were uniformities – a consequence of “selective biases” and there were plenty of surprises, a consequence of the open systematic character of the world. But such a metaphysic calls for a historical and concrete social science. The “description of particular forces” at work are the analogue of the “selective biases” discoverable by physical science. The “particular consequences” which they produce are not guaranteed in advance because there is always the fact of agency working with materials at hand. There are no “general laws” under which we can subsume and thereby explain wars, revolutions or, for that matter, hurricanes or the genesis of a species. Indeed, all concrete events are the product of many causes working conjointly. (See Manicas, 2006, Chapter 5).

Dewey concludes this brief but rich essay by remarking that “there is...an immense amount of empirical subject-matter contained within the confines of existing social sciences. The only trouble is that it has been ‘framed up’ and betrayed by its mythical and apologetic setting” (MW 11: 91). He does not, unfortunately, elaborate on this very pregnant idea; but there is little doubt that it regards the guiding principles of positivist social science.

The example raises, as well, the question of the relation of democracy to social scientific knowledge. For the technocrats, one “controls” the conditions and gets “predictable results”. More, because “experts” have knowledge which the “masses” lack, democracy must give way.

**Social Science and Democracy**

It is easy enough to establish that World War I had a tremendous impact on Dewey and that one of the consequences was his readiness to believe that the war had brought forward “the more conscious and extensive use of science for communal purposes”. It had “made it customary to utilize collective knowledge and skill of scientific experts of all kinds, organizing them for community ends”. The warfare state, remarkably, had laid the foundations for the Nationalist Liberalism which became the political agenda of Dewey’s associates at the *The New Republic*. But when Walter Lippmann, already persuaded of a technocratic version of social control, published his *Phantom Public* in 1925, Dewey finally came to grips with the problem of scientific knowledge and democracy.16

In *The Public and Its Problems* (1927), Dewey agreed that there were a host of “technical” questions which could be answered by “experts”: “sanitation, public health, healthful and adequate housing, transportation, planning of cities, regulation and distribution of immigrants, selection and management of personnel, right methods of instruction and preparation of competent teachers, scientific adjustment of taxation, efficient management of funds and so on” (LW 2: 313). But the idea that such knowledge was sufficient was profoundly in

error. Those who hold to such views “ignore forces which have to be composed and resolved before technical and specialized action can come into play” (LW 2: 313). The problem is deep: “It is in the first instance the search for conditions under which the Great Society may become the Great Community” (LW 2: 327). The public is lost, eclipsed, inchoate, bewildered, caught in a drift which it cannot grasp and therefore cannot overcome. Indeed, “the prime condition of a democratically organized public is a kind of knowledge and insight which does not exist” (LW 2: 339). Citizens needed to understand what was happening and why. Some technical knowledge was needed, to be sure, but in the absence of a widely shared understanding of the “forces” at work, no democratic public could emerge.

Dewey is not as radical as he might be in assigning the causes of this. Put aside here the problems of distributing “the kind of knowledge which does not exist”, for example, problems of the corporate control of mass communication, and concentrate here on the role of the social sciences themselves. In particular, while he acknowledges the limits of the special sciences in generating such knowledge, he does not seem to see that they contribute mightily to the mystification of what needs to be known. Instead of illuminating and emancipating, too much contemporary social science obscures and misleads.

Dewey gets his hands on some of the reasons for this. He notes that the “backwardness of social knowledge is marked in its division into independent and insulated branches of learning” (LW 2: 171). This point, versus disciplinary social science is never noticed and is critical17. But this is more than a “mark” of its “backwardness”: It guarantees backwardness. It is not merely, as he says, that there is lacking “continuous cross-fertilization”, but that fragmentation prevents us from grasping causes and connections.

Dewey notes also that specialized knowledge aims to be “abstract” which practically means that “it is not conceived in terms of its bearing on human life” (LW 2: 171). Plainly, the commitment to value-neutrality requires this. The upshot, of course, is not value-neutrality, but as Veblen insisted, scientific legitimation of “usages and conventions that have by habit become embedded in the received scheme of use and wont, and so have been found to be good and right”. Social science happily conspires in persuading us that the poor have only themselves to blame.

Dewey argues forcefully that what counts as “news” in our daily papers is rendered completely unintelligible in terms of its connections but fails to argue that this tendency is reinforced by “fact-gathering” social science. He is correct that “a genuine social science would manifest its reality in the daily press, while learned books and articles supply and polish tools of inquiry” (LW 2: 347), but of course, it is precisely because “we” are not journalists but “social scientists” that we write jargonized “learned” books and articles. As Lynd said, we are either “scholars” or “technicians” – working for whoever will pay the bill.

Finally, for all of Dewey’s interest in education, he makes no mention of the disastrous consequences of current patterns of education in the social sciences. Instead of cultivating what Mills called “the sociological imagination”, we offer students textbooks which guarantee disciplinary fragmentation, empty abstractions and uncritical thought. Instead of seeking causes and insisting on making connections, we require “disciplinary” integrity. Instead of raising questions about “habits embedded in the received scheme of things”, we seek “relations of variables”.

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17 See also Logic (LW 12: 501-502).
Dewey was surely on the right track when, as early as his essay on Renan, he offered some reasons for these patterns of ideology and disinformation. He then wrote that we do not yet appreciate “the dead weight of class interest which resists all attempts of science to take practical form and become a “social motor” (EW: 4: 17). I conclude by saying that we still do not – itself a function of the failure of the present practices of the social sciences.

References


Patrick Baert

Neo-Pragmatism and Phenomenology: A Proposal

Abstract. This article introduces a new pragmatist-inspired perspective on the social sciences. It explores the relevance of neo-pragmatism for the philosophy of the social sciences, showing how it can lead to innovative and groundbreaking social research. The paper attempts to drive home these insights by elaborating on the affinities of neo-pragmatism with some Continental philosophers who have engaged with Husserl’s phenomenology, notably Gadamer, Levinas and Sartre. This neo-pragmatist proposal for the social sciences develops a non-representational view of knowledge and puts the ongoing engagement with difference at the centre of social research. From this perspective, the process of knowledge formation is dialogical in nature whereby the researcher learns as much from those who are being researched as vice versa. The concluding section aims to show the implications of this perspective for current research in the social sciences, throwing new light on contemporary meta-discussions about social research.

Introduction

In this article, I will elaborate on the precise nature of the neo-pragmatist agenda for the social sciences which I have been developing over the last couple of years and which I have tried to crystallize in Philosophy of the Sciences: Towards Pragmatism (Baert 2005) and a number of other publications (e.g. Baert 2006, 2007). I will argue that this neo-pragmatist agenda changes our priorities about social research. Its significance can be shown especially in relation to the writings of a number of authors, who engage with Husserl’s phenomenology. There is much to be gained by integrating insights from American neo-pragmatism and, in particular Emmanuel Levinas, Hans-Georg Gadamer and Jean-Paul Sartre. Although prima facie very different, these three Continental-European authors have a non-representational view of knowledge and language in common, as well as a commitment to putting the ongoing engagement with difference at the centre of philosophy. I will argue that this new way of thinking about philosophy has repercussions for how we conduct social research in ways that tie in especially neatly with the recent debates around, for instance, public sociology.

By pragmatism I refer to the distinct philosophical tradition, initially set in motion by Charles Peirce, later developed by William James and John Dewey, and further articulated by Richard Bernstein and Richard Rorty. This philosophical tradition is often portrayed as quintessentially American, and for very good reasons. Not only did the major pragmatists live and work in the US. Their philosophical works emerged in response to distinctly American problems and concerns; they expressed distinctly American sentiments, hopes and anxieties. This is not to say that pragmatism is solely an American enterprise. Some European philosophers of the nineteenth century, like Henri Bergson and Friedrich Nietzsche, developed views which were remarkably close to those of pragmatism, as did the Oxford-based philosopher F.C.S. Schiller at the beginning of the twentieth century. Some of the older generation of American pragmatists studied in Europe, had regular intellectual exchanges...
with European intellectuals and were very much indebted to them. More recent exponents of pragmatist philosophy, like Rorty and Bernstein, engaged with and saw affinities with a number of Continental European authors who were considered seriously out of line within the analytical tradition. The multiplicity of influences is not surprising, given that American pragmatism has always portrayed itself as non-doctrinaire, open and receptive to new ideas, in contrast with the boundary-consciousness of analytical philosophy and its general disdain towards much written in the German and French tradition.

If American pragmatism has been shown to be open to European philosophy, the latter has been less receptive towards the former. There are notable exceptions like Jürgen Habermas (1981a, 1981b, 1994[1968]), whose critique of positivism and theory of communicative action drew on Peirce and the pragmatist tradition. All too often, however, Pragmatism has been discarded as a parochial endeavour, too deeply ingrained in American society and its problems to appeal to a broader philosophical audience. Underlying my contribution is the conviction that this picture of pragmatism is deeply misleading. By integrating American neo-pragmatism and phenomenology, I will demonstrate not only the bearing of pragmatism on contemporary philosophy of social science, but also the fruitfulness of a continued dialogue between the two traditions which on the surface look so different.

Although the argument which I will develop here is inspired by pragmatist philosophy, notably by Bernstein and Rorty’s neo-pragmatism, this is not to say that either of them would endorse the views that I develop, let alone express them precisely in the way in which I do. Although generally sympathetic to their outlook, the problems addressed in this chapter and the questions asked are quite different from those of the neo-pragmatists, and the argument elaborated stands very much on its own.

This article consists of six parts. The first section discusses which components of pragmatist philosophy are central to my proposal for the philosophy of social science, and the second section demonstrates how my perspective differs from the two approaches that dominate the philosophy of social science and social research. The third section explores the relationship between my agenda and Sartre’s ontology, in particular his distinction between Being-in-itself and Being-for-itself. The fourth section explains how my approach draws on Levinas’ conceptualisation of otherness, and the fifth shows how my pragmatist-inspired proposal ties in with Gadamer’s dialogical notion of understanding. Finally, the article shows the contemporary relevance of my proposal by focusing on the significance of social research for society.

**Pragmatism and pragmatisms**

Before we proceed further, it is important to gain clarity as to the meaning of “pragmatism” and a “pragmatist agenda” as opposed to the employment of the term in everyday language. People often equate “pragmatism” with a “pragmatic” attitude, according to which action ought not to be guided by *a priori* principles but primarily by an assessment of the actual constraints and opportunities of a given context. In foreign policy, the label “pragmatism” refers precisely to this non-ideological stance, whereby political actors routinely seek to gauge and take advantage of what comes their way. Likewise, when social scientists label research as “pragmatist”, sometimes they mean that it does not follow rigid methodological principles and instead exhibits an eclectic or opportunistic choice and application of method. In those circumstances, I prefer to term this a “pragmatic” attitude to distinguish it from the “pragmatist” argument developed here. So a pragmatic stance implies that the
choice of theories or techniques depends on the particular topic of investigation or situation at hand rather than on a well-articulated philosophical or theoretical position.

My argument for a pragmatist stance has little in common with the methodological opportunism that characterises a pragmatic attitude. Firstly, I am not arguing that social researchers should pick and choose the theoretical framework or technique that somehow “fits” or “corresponds” best to the data or that seems opportune given the circumstances. I am actually sceptical of this view, not in the least because it draws on a problematic metaphor of vision as if social research is meant to mirror the external social world as accurately as possible (of which more in section two). Secondly, whilst a pragmatic attitude questions the usefulness of any philosophical account for social research, pragmatism questions the value of some philosophical debates, in particular about essences or ontology, and it also doubts the merit of some philosophical views, for instance, foundationalism. Pragmatism is sceptical of intellectual disputes if taking one or another position has no practical consequences for anyone (James 1907). For pragmatists, questions about inner essences or ontology are such scholastic enterprises because answering them in one way or another makes no practical difference.

What is the common ground which pragmatist philosophers share? What distinguishes the pragmatist outlook from those of other philosophical traditions? And which of the pragmatists’ ideas have influenced my own agenda for the philosophy of the social sciences? To identify which ideas are shared by pragmatists is not a sinecure because pragmatism was, and still is, a heterogeneous entity. From the beginning, pragmatism entailed competing branches and antithetical positions, even to the extent that Charles Peirce, who coined the term, later distanced himself from “pragmatism” because he felt that some of the beliefs carried under this banner were so alien to his. It is ironic that some philosophers, whom we now regard as iconic figures of the pragmatist movement, occasionally invoked other labels to refer to themselves, with Peirce’s “pragmaticism” and Dewey’s “instrumentalism” being particularly poignant examples. More recently, Richard Bernstein, Donald Davidson, Nelson Goodman, Hilary Putnam and Richard Rorty have taken pragmatism into uncharted territories (such as literary criticism and critical theory). This has led commentators to question whether some of those contemporary developments can be as easily reconciled with earlier forms of pragmatism as the likes of Rorty would have us believe.

Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to infer from this that pragmatists have little in common. Most pragmatist philosophers – old and new – share a number of key ideas, which makes it possible to talk about a pragmatist movement. It is particularly important to illustrate a number of these ideas here because they underscore my perspective on the philosophy of the social sciences.

To start with, few commentators mention the humanist tendencies of pragmatism, which is surprising given how pervasive humanism is amongst classical and contemporary pragmatists and how essential it is to their intellectual project. William James (1911: 121-35), John Dewey (1994) and F.C.S. Schiller (1903, 1907) occasionally used the term to contextualise their own work, though they attributed different meanings to it. By humanism I refer to a particular perspective according to which cognitive, ethical and aesthetic claims, including claims about those claims, are intertwined with human projects and are predominantly human creations. Not only ought those claims to be judged on their practical contribution to society, they are also social and cultural in nature, often entailing the cooperation of many individuals and drawing on a complex web of symbols and cultural codes. The social and cultural dimension of those claims has, in turn, a number of repercussions, of
which the rejection of both foundationalism and objective knowledge are particularly important.

By foundationalism one refers to the belief that philosophy can establish a-temporal, universal foundations that secure aesthetic, ethical or cognitive claims. Historically, a significant number of philosophers conceived of their work as primarily a foundational enterprise. To be foundational in this sense, philosophy ought to be able to step outside history – outside culture or language – so as to adopt a “neutral” position from which the right kind of prescriptions can be made. Most pragmatists take an anti-foundationalist stance. They believe that philosophical reflection cannot achieve this position of neutrality because it is, like other intellectual accomplishments, a human activity; and as a human activity, a social activity; and as a social activity, a situated activity (see, for instance, Peirce 1877, 1878; Dewey 1938; Rorty 1982: xiiff; Bernstein 1991: 326ff.). This means that philosophical knowledge, like any other kind of knowledge, is always partial: it takes place from a certain vantage point. Pragmatists call for humility amongst philosophers, because, no matter what the amount of cleaning work they do, philosophy can never remove those human stains. As such, it cannot obtain the neutral stance which foundationalism requires.

A similar argument applies to other forms of knowledge, including scientific knowledge (Dewey 1929; James 1907). Scientific knowledge, too, is situated, partial, enacted from a particular viewpoint. Logical positivists spent a great deal of effort showing that scientific knowledge is superior to other forms of knowledge because it supposedly meets stringent criteria of objectivity. In this context, one talks about objective knowledge if it is not affected significantly by the attitudes and values of those who obtain this knowledge. In contrast, pragmatists insist that scientific knowledge is an intervention in the world and that, as an intervention, it is necessarily shaped by the interests or focus of the researchers involved. This does not mean that knowledge is necessarily always subjective, if by subjective we mean that it fails to represent the external world accurately. In fact, pragmatists avoid using the label “subjective” altogether; firstly, because it implies the possibility of objective knowledge in the way in which logical positivism postulated it; and secondly, because it mistakenly assumes that knowledge has something to do with the copying of the external world.

Descartes’ method supposedly provided philosophical foundations that ensure infallible knowledge. In contrast, the pragmatist world is indicative of what Hilary Putnam called the “democratisation of inquiry”: devoid of foundations, people are encouraged to reassess their views in the light of new empirical evidence (Putnam 2004). Various pragmatists might interpret this fallibilism differently. For the older generation of pragmatists, like Peirce, Dewey and Mead, scientific conjectures are empirically tested and, if necessary, replaced by superior scientific conjectures. It is the confrontation with new empirical phenomena that precipitates doubt, which only subsides once the old theory has been adjusted. Neo-pragmatists are less concerned with scientific discovery and change. They are more interested in how communities can adopt new vocabularies, re-describing themselves in the light of the new information provided. Rich, vital cultures are confident enough to exhibit openness towards uncomfortable experiences. As such, they are well-equipped to re-describe and reinvent themselves. However, in both cases, anti-foundationalism goes hand in hand with a genuine fallibilist attitude whereby people are willing to question entrenched beliefs and replace them with more useful ones.

I already hinted earlier at the pragmatist rejection of the mirror view of knowledge (see, for instance, James 1907; Dewey 1929; Rorty 1980, 1999: 47-71). This mirror view conceives of knowledge in terms of passive and accurate recording of the essence of the exter-
nal world. In this view, the external world is taken to be independent of human experience, waiting to be discovered. This pictorial view has its intellectual origins in the Platonic perspective on knowledge. Plato took knowledge as passive contemplation as opposed to active involvement; only the philosophers’ contemplation would allow proper and unmediated access to the real world. The mirror view is widespread both in philosophical and scientific circles, and it assumes an opposition between theory and knowledge on the one hand, and practice and action on the other. Knowledge is taken to be passive and instantaneous, whereas action is, by definition, active and proceeds through time. One of the upshots of this view is that knowledge should no longer be judged on the basis of its isomorphic relationship to the external realm, but on the basis of what kind of contribution it makes to our world. For too long, the dualism between theory and practice and its attendant preoccupation with accurate representation has led western philosophers to ignore the practical difference knowledge can make. Pragmatism breaks with this dualism and takes seriously the notion of scientific engagement.

Pragmatist-inspired philosophy of social science

Pragmatism, as outlined above, has significant repercussions for the philosophy of the social sciences. The philosophy of social science is a meta-theoretical enterprise which reflects on the nature and workings of social research, often leading to recommendations about which methodology or theory should be used. My pragmatist-inspired perspective on the philosophy of social science draws on the insights illustrated in the previous section and on the integration of pragmatism and continental philosophy (infra). This perspective, centred around the notion of self-understanding, is diametrically opposed to two perspectives which have dominated the mainstream of the philosophy of social science, and which I call “representationalism” and “methodological naturalism”. In what follows I describe and criticise these two perspectives, and this will allow me to discuss in more detail the contours of my perspective.

To start with, “representationalism” is a widespread position in meta-theoretical reflections on the social sciences, though more implicit than overtly defended or propagated. Representationalists presuppose that social research aims to map or depict the social world as accurately and completely as possible, with social theory providing the necessary building blocks for this social cartography. Empirical research is regarded as fruitful if the theory used is shown to be eminently applicable and to allow for the social cartography to take place effectively. Amongst those who adhere to this philosophical outlook are structuralists, structuration theorists and critical realists, although most do so implicitly rather than defending it explicitly. The problems with representationalism are twofold, one referring to the mechanical and repetitive nature of the research conducted under its banner, and the other referring to its flawed notion of knowledge. Firstly, it makes for repetitive and uninspiring research, whereby a particular theoretical framework, to which a group of researchers is committed, is habitually applied to new settings, and thereby continually used and reproduced. In this social cartography model, empirical research reinforces the theory that is used, rather than checking its validity. As empirical research is no longer seen as a testing device but as providing instantiations of a given theory (and so yielding yet further evidence that the theory “fits” various situations), the possibility of theoretical innovation is very limited and operates only within the contours set by the theory. Secondly, representationalists assume what John Dewey facetiously called the “spectator theory of knowledge” according to which knowledge mysteriously captures the inner essence of the external
world (Dewey 1929). As seen in the previous section, the spectator theory of knowledge is problematic, relying as it does on a passive notion of knowledge acquisition as if it is a flaccid mirroring of the outer world (Rorty 1980; 1999: xvi-xxxii, 23-46). Also, it fails to grasp the temporal dimension of knowledge acquisition, the extent to which it is the outcome of a process rather than an instantaneous occurrence. In this context, it is worth invoking Dewey’s distinction between “knowledge” and “experience”: whereas the latter alludes to a passive and immediate sensation of the outer world, the former refers to the outcome of an active process of reflection (Dewey 1910; 1929). The spectator theory of knowledge erroneously conflates the immediacy and passivity that is characteristic of experience with that of knowledge, thereby promoting a flawed notion of “immediate knowledge.”

More generally, influenced by Darwinism, the early generation of pragmatists already conceived of knowledge in terms of process and action, insisting that knowledge is one of the tools people use to adjust, cope and interact with their external surroundings (Mead 1936; 1938). While from an evolutionary point of view, the intricate link between knowledge, process and action is imminently plausible, it is more difficult to see how, through time, people would have managed to develop knowledge that represents the world as it really is. Similar to Gadamer for whom any act of description or making sense of the external world draws on a variety of presuppositions which give the representation direction and shape, pragmatists are committed to a holistic perspective according to which so-called statements of fact always tie in with theoretical presuppositions.

Moving to the second meta-theoretical perspective, a significant number of philosophers of social science are committed “methodological naturalists”, searching for a unifying scientific method which would be applicable to both the natural and social sciences. Within the discipline of philosophy falsificationists and critical realists subscribe to methodological naturalism, whereas in the social sciences diverse research programmes, ranging from rational choice theory to Durkheim-inspired structural analysis, accept this philosophical position albeit often implicitly rather than discursively formulated. Methodological naturalism should not be confused with “ontological naturalism”, which assumes that the social and the natural sciences are comprised of the same substance. Methodological naturalism assumes that a distinctive method underlies most, if not all, successful scientific activities, and that philosophical reflection can show why this method is so superior to others. This means that methodological naturalists hold two distinct, though related views, one being philosophical and the other historical. On the one hand, they are wedded to a foundationalist outlook which supposedly captures the essence of science – that which distinguishes it from lesser forms of knowledge acquisition like religion, ideology or pseudo-science. On the other hand, they hold a particular historical view according to which the natural sciences have employed this successful methodological strategy for quite a while whereas the social sciences, being too close to their subject matter, have consistently failed to do so. Unsurprisingly, naturalist philosophers of social sciences often make recommendations for social research, urging it to grow up and emulate the “mature science” which can be found in the departments of physics and chemistry.

As indicated in the earlier section, pragmatists tend to question the virtues of foundationalist reasoning in general, and in this case the empirical studies of science seem to confirm this scepticism. Contrary to the naturalist agenda, studies in the history and in sociology of science show that the closer we look at the actual workings of scientists, the less support emerges for a unifying methodology within the natural sciences, let alone across the natural and social sciences (e.g. Latour and Woolgar 1979). There is a growing awareness that scientific research does not fit neat, objectivist criteria, that various disciplines operate quite
differently, and that within each discipline there are national and local traditions which culminate in distinct methodological practices to such an extent that it is no longer warranted to talk about a unifying method.

Whereas naturalist philosophies of social science take for granted that social research is primarily an explanatory (and possibly predictive) endeavour, a pragmatist-inspired perspective explores the intricate relationship between method and cognitive interests and refuses to take for granted that explanation and prediction are the only legitimate cognitive interests (see also Rorty 1982: 191-210). Besides explanation and prediction, pragmatists also consider other cognitive interests to be integral to the social sciences, amongst which are meaningful understanding, social critique and emancipation, and (importantly for my argument) self-understanding (Baert 2005: 146-169). Whereas classical pragmatists focused on the problem solving qualities of science, my neo-pragmatist perspective, influenced by Rorty’s appropriation of the German notion of Bildung or self-edification, underscores the importance of the notion of self-understanding. This concept refers to the process by which knowledge can help groups of people re-describe, re-evaluate and reconceptualise themselves. Major breakthroughs in science have often been accompanied by substantial changes in the way in which people conceptualised themselves. In some cases, such as with Darwinism, this even led to a radical rethink of the position of humanity as a whole.

Self-understanding occupies a particularly central place in the humanities and the social sciences, serving as they do to encourage groups of people to rethink who they are in the face of a confrontation with other forms of meaningful activity. This explains why some commentators go as far as arguing that the emergence of sociology or the social sciences is itself a sign of increasing collective self-knowledge under conditions of modernity (Wagner 1994). Crucially, when academics in the humanities and social sciences are asked to list the intellectual milestones of their discipline, they tend to select works which bring about this Gestalt-switch. Whereas self-understanding might be an interesting corollary of significant transformations in the natural sciences, the case of the humanities and social sciences is quite different as self-understanding is absolutely integral to what makes for a substantial work in this area of the academy. Key contributions to social research might obtain other cognitive interests – for instance, they might exhibit strong explanatory or predictive power -, but ultimately, I argue, self-understanding remains the key criterion by which the significance of a piece of research will be judged (Baert 2007). Self-understanding does not imply that people necessarily agree on how to re-conceptualise themselves in the light of a new or established framework, and indeed there is often substantial disagreement on this score. But whether or not there is agreement, a significant contribution in the humanities and the social sciences forces individuals to reconsider some of their presuppositions about themselves in the face of the new narrative presented.

In what follows, I will discuss particular aspects of the work of Jean-Paul Sartre, Emmanuel Levinas and Hans-Georg Gadamer. By doing so, I will demonstrate that a dialogue between neo-pragmatism and European phenomenology is possible. More importantly, this fruitful dialogue leads to an identification of the key features of a method (and an ethos) of social research which revolves around the idea of self-understanding and which bears more promise for the social sciences than the current fixation on representationalism and methodological naturalism.

While Sartre, Levinas and Gadamer all engage with Husserl’s phenomenology, each takes it in a direction different from Husserl’s that is convergent with mine. What follows is not an attempt to rediscover or resuscitate Husserl’s philosophy (which in crucial respects is diametrically opposed to my neo-pragmatist argument), but to show how subsequent devel-
Developments within phenomenology help enrich a neo-pragmatist perspective on the philosophy of the social sciences. There is, however, one important link between my argument and Husserl’s which is worth mentioning at this stage. For Husserl, philosophy is not merely an intellectual enterprise without external value; it is also a means for obtaining self-knowledge or self-discovery. Philosophy enables the individual to create a useful distance towards him- or herself and to conceptualise the self differently. This, so Husserl argued, would eventually help to create a form of freedom. The neo-pragmatist argument, which I have been developing, takes equally seriously this notion of self-knowledge and recognises the important role philosophy may play in achieving it. There are differences, though, between the neo-pragmatist use of self-knowledge and that of Husserl. Essential to my argument is that the social sciences—not philosophy—are particularly well-placed for achieving it. Also different from Husserl’s individualist reading is the neo-pragmatist argument that self-knowledge is a collective achievement; it is something shared by members of a community.

Sartre and epistemological authenticity

My neo-pragmatist philosophy of the social sciences shows striking affinities with the existentialist phenomenology as it was developed by Martin Heidegger and Jean-Paul Sartre. Both Heidegger and Sartre engage critically with Husserl’s writings and take phenomenology in a new direction, which I would argue is closer to pragmatist philosophy. Firstly, like pragmatists, existentialist phenomenologists recognise the quintessentially human nature of cognitive, ethical and aesthetic claims. This position leads, amongst other things, to the questioning of both the possibility of objectivity and of the viability of epistemology, because it is no longer held possible for philosophers and scientists to decipher a neutral algorithm that would allow them to escape history and culture. Secondly, like pragmatists, existential phenomenologists reject the opposition or dualism between the subject and an independent external world. As people’s knowledge is seen as inevitably embedded in and practically engaged with the world, the opposition between the knower and known, assumed by both realism and idealism, becomes a mere artificial intellectual construct. Thirdly, both philosophical strands—pragmatism and existential phenomenology—reject the spectator theory of knowledge according to which knowledge mirrors or captures the external world. Indeed existentialist phenomenologists distanced themselves from Husserl whose notion of the transcendental ego—a disembodied, detached ego—was indicative of the way in which he was still wedded to a spectator theory of knowledge. In contrast with the spectator theory that conceives of objects as vorhanden (“present-at-hand”, detached), existentialists emphasise that people encounter objects first and foremost as zuhanden (“ready-to-hand”, like a tool). Pragmatists and existentialists argue that the form of reflexive intelligence, which is characteristic of vorhanden, only arises when people are confronted with unexpected experiences. Fourthly, whereas Husserl’s phenomenology conceives of meaning in terms of essences and senses of words, existentialist phenomenology resembles pragmatism in promoting a holistic picture and in demonstrating the intricate link between understanding and purposive action. So in contrast with Husserl, pragmatists and existentialists subscribe to Wittgenstein’s later views about meaning and how it is embedded in larger systems or “forms of life”.

In clarifying the connections between the neo-pragmatist agenda and existentialist phenomenology, Sartre’s L'être et le néant (1943) and L’existentialisme est un humanisme (1996) are particularly instructive. Sartre’s anti-essentialism manifests itself in his refusal to
accept that human beings – *any* human being, as a matter of fact – can be defined in terms of a set of fixed characteristics. However subtle a description of an individual, he or she is always able to overcome this account and prove otherwise through his or her actions. Ultimately, people are nothing but the sum of their actions, so it is a fallacy, for instance, to say that a person who acted cowardly all his life was deep down truly courageous (Sartre 1996: 26-27, 29-30). People might adopt strategies to deny their intrinsic freedom, and there are indeed various instances of this bad faith, but a genuinely full life requires that one acknowledges the freedom which one has and makes choices whilst ensuring that others are free as well. Freedom is also at the heart of Sartre’s distinction between being-in-itself and being-for-itself. Whereas being-in-itself exists independent of consciousness and can therefore only be what it is, being-for-itself refers to the fluid aspect of human existence. It was Hegel who initially coined the term “being-for-itself” to refer to the uniquely self-conscious dimension of human being, the extent to which individuals are, unlike objects, able to reflect on the conditions of their existence and to act accordingly. Likewise, Sartre’s notion of being-for-itself centres round the reflexive component of human existence, capturing as it does the ability of human beings to transcend the most structurally constraining of circumstances and ultimately their capacity to exercise genuine freedom even in the face of severe adversity (Sartre 1943: 109-141).

Sartre focused on individuals and individual decisions but his arguments can be translated into a social vocabulary, a move which helps to further clarify the neo-pragmatist proposal which I have been advocating. Just as Sartre argued that individuals have the freedom to define themselves and to deny the categories that are imposed on them, a given social setting does not necessitate a specific account, descriptions or explanation. Just like individuals who, by virtue of their self-consciousness, escape fixed descriptions, any social setting can be re-described and rearticulated *ad infinitum* and there is no *a priori* reason to rule out any of those accounts on epistemological grounds. Both representationalists and naturalists are mistaken in searching for a final vocabulary that would mysteriously “fit” a given social situation because the epistemological or theoretical justifications provided have been shown to be flawed. For social researchers to search for such a final vocabulary is basically to act in what Sartre would call bad faith (Sartre 1943: 81-106): that is, for them to deny their own undeniable freedom to present new, exciting narratives, to string together the kind of storylines which makes us look at old themes in novel, interesting ways (see also Rorty 1980: 365-379). There are various academic, institutional forces that entice social researchers to deny their own freedom, be it the urge for “scientific” recognition or the loyalties to established academic clans and their patriarchs. Firstly, whether positivist or falsificationist, researchers often allude to “science” or “scientific procedures” to justify the methodological decisions they make. However, as I have pointed out in the above and elsewhere, references to “the scientific method” are always problematic given the methodological diversity between scientific disciplines and even within them. Secondly, institutionalised loyalties towards an intellectual school (or towards a mentor) risk culminating in repetitive practice whereby empirical research is seen simply as an instantiation of the theoretical framework or general orientation that is being adopted. It is difficult to break those loyalties given the power relations involved and the extent to which they are tied in with academic job prospects and career progression.

In a nutshell, my argument for a neo-pragmatist perspective, with its acknowledgement that there is no neutral algorithm that will help us decide which theories or methods to adopt, calls on researchers to escape those epistemological and institutional constraints and to acknowledge the freedom to construct innovative narratives and help communities rede-
fine themselves. Following on from Sartre’s notion of “authenticity” (as the mirror image of bad faith) (Sartre: 70-71), what I am proposing could be described as “epistemological authenticity”, by which I mean that researchers ought to cast off epistemological shackles, recognising their intellectual ability to shatter established storylines and their moral responsibility to do so.

Levinas and the encounter with the other

My argument for a pragmatist-inspired philosophy centred around the idea of self-understanding ties in with Emmanuel Levinas’ arguments put forward in his *Théorie de l’intuition dans la phénoméologie de Husserl* (1970 [1930]), *Le temps et l’autre* (1991 [1947]), *Autrement qu’être ou au-delà de l’essence* (1974) and in particular in his *magnum opus Totalité et infini* (1961). Compared to other French philosophers referred to as operating neatly within the phenomenological tradition, like Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Paul Ricoeur or Jean-Luc Marion, Levinas occupies such a distinctive position and his central claims are so strongly opposed to Husserl’s philosophy that it is difficult to justify labelling his work as unambiguously phenomenological. Influenced by Franz Rosenzweig and Martin Buber, Levinas’ divergence from Husserl and other phenomenologists stems from their failure to recognise the distinctiveness and irreducibility of the Other, and Levinas tries to show the implications of that failure for philosophy. From his early writings onwards, Levinas shows interest in the notion of escape, which refers to the positive need of the individual to avoid the facticity of existence and in particular to break with the sheer individual experience of being oneself. From the point of view of the later Levinas, the individual can only achieve this distanitation towards the self by engaging properly with alterity. In this regard, Levinas’ position heralds those of Edward Said and Homi Bhabha developed half a century later. They denounce a large proportion of western thought and literary criticism for not engaging sufficiently with different cultures and for imposing their own dichotomies on what is by all accounts a radically different cultural landscape.

For Levinas, Western philosophy, and indeed Western thought in general, promotes a distinctive and ultimately problematic relationship between the Same (or the self or the subject) and the Other, and phenomenology is no exception in this regard. In this dominant view, otherness might provisionally appear as differentiated from sameness, but this is only a temporary phase as the former can always be reinterpreted in terms of the latter and be assimilated to it. The metaphor of light plays an important role in this philosophical tradition: once otherness is illuminated, it loses its “alterity” (Levinas 1978: 74ff.). Hence, there is an inability on the part of western thought to experience, engage with and learn from something that is truly different from itself.

Husserl’s phenomenology is a case in point, arguing as he does that any encounter with the external world takes place through acts of meaning bestowed by the subject onto it. The subject can only encounter otherness in so far as it is articulated and rearticulated in terms of that which is familiar to the subject, but by doing so, the very nature of otherness is negated (Levinas 1967: 1970). In contrast, Levinas wants to safeguard the unfamiliarity of the Other against the invasions of the Same, and like Heidegger, he finds it necessary to create a new terminology – a new language, one might say – to bring this project to fruition. Rather than attempting to gain knowledge about the Other so as to submit it to the logic of sameness, Levinas’ project entails that otherness is, by definition, outside the grasp of the self. Otherness is not to be understood simply as that which is “other than me”. To do so would be to downgrade it to something that is relative to me or that I can articulate in terms
of my vocabulary. For Levinas, the Other remains absolutely external to me and, by virtue of its radical difference, resists conceptualisation and intelligibility (Levinas 1961, 1967).

As many commentators have pointed out, a significant part of Levinas’ work consists of an ethical shift in existential phenomenology, exploring as he does the extent to which the confrontation with others imposes a variety of obligations on the individual. However, for my purposes, Levinas’ attention to the relationship between alterity and dialogue is more important. While Levinas wants to hold onto Husserl’s position that intentionality represents the world through the mediation of consciousness, he is very keen to emphasise that the encounter with the external world makes for a dynamic exchange whereby the subject engages with and is affected by the Other. Comparably to Gadamer’s dialogical notion of understanding, Levinas sees the confrontation with alterity also as an opportunity for the self to reassert, re-evaluate and redefine itself. In the face of otherness, the self can undergo change while still retaining its sameness (Levinas 1961: 5-10).

Despite his notoriously nebulous language and his lack of interest in the status and objectives of contemporary social research, Levinas’ treatment of the complex relationship between self and alterity is relevant here because of its substantial bearing for a pragmatist-inspired philosophy of social science. Few social researchers and indeed even fewer philosophers of social science show a genuine interest in the concept of otherness, let alone incorporate it into their writings. In their particular endeavours to obtain reliable knowledge of the social world, neither the representationalist nor the naturalist perspective on the social sciences engages properly with otherness. Wedded to a spectator theory of knowledge, the social cartography model treats the encounter with otherness in a way that reinforces the theoretical framework in operation, thereby replicating familiar theories and undoing the unfamiliarity of empirical experiences. Likewise, naturalists tend to use metaphors and analogies with well-known phenomena to explain and possibly predict new, unfamiliar phenomena, thereby again failing to engage properly with, and learn from, what is being studied. In both cases, the methodology is used as a strategic weapon to negate a genuine encounter with different forms of life – to ensure, in other words, that no real surprises are in store. The pragmatist-inspired philosophical project, on the other hand, conceives of the encountering of different forms of life as an enormous opportunity to re-describe, re-assess, and re-create ourselves (Rorty 1999: 87-88). In Levinasian parlance, one of the central tenets of my proposal is to conceive of social research as a proper engagement with otherness, refusing to reduce alterity to sameness. The key to this research programme is a dialogical model, which cuts right across the traditional dichotomy between the knower and the known. For this, it proves particular useful to draw on Gadamer’s account of understanding, which is more developed than Levinas’.

**Gadamer and the pursuit of self-understanding**

Whereas Levinas’ thought is embedded in the phenomenological tradition, Gadamer’s central arguments, as developed in *Wahrheit und Methode* (1975), are often seen as entrenched in hermeneutics. It is indeed true that Gadamer situates himself very much in relation to the “romantic hermeneutics” of Wilhelm Dilthey and other nineteenth century authors. However, Husserl and Heidegger’s influences loom large, especially where Gadamer decides to deviate from nineteenth century hermeneutic authors. Gadamer shares Dilthey’s critique of positivist attempts to model the *Geisteswissenschaften* onto the natural sciences, but disagrees with Dilthey’s project to put the social and historical sciences on as secure, objective a footing as the natural sciences (Gadamer 1975: 162-250). Central to Gadamer’s
position is Husserl and Heidegger’s argument that the objective natural sciences can only emerge within a historically engraved “life-world”. Parallel to my own rejection of naturalism, Gadamer argues that the standards of “objectivity”, which are associated with the natural sciences, ought not to be seen as norms for knowledge tout court because those “scientific” yardsticks, like any criteria, have developed within a particular tradition. Similarly to the pragmatist call for methodological diversity, Gadamer insists that to treat “scientific” criteria of “objectivity” as the standards of knowledge is to neglect other historically situated norms and criteria. In opposition to the Cartesian preoccupation with a method of objective understanding, Gadamer’s “philosophical hermeneutics” explores the conditions of possibility of understanding. This philosophical project puts him on a collision course with the Enlightenment orthodoxy which conceives of tradition and prejudice (Vorurteil) as impediments to proper understanding. For Gadamer, nothing could be further from the truth because understanding cannot take place without tradition and prejudice. Resembling the pragmatist critique of the Enlightenment search for a neutral algorithm for knowledge (Rorty 1999: xii-xxiii), Gadamer argues that any appeal to reason and method also necessarily draws on tradition and prejudice and thereby inevitably invokes what was meant to be eradicated. However, if Gadamer claims that tradition and prejudice are a sine qua non for understanding, he does not mean that understanding is an individual or arbitrary accomplishment. Mirroring the pragmatist insistence on the social and historical nature of knowledge claims, Gadamer treats tradition as a shared experience, rooted in and developed within a long historical trajectory. Gadamer coins the term “effective history” (Wirkungsgeschichte) to refer to the way in which tradition and its history affects us even when we try to shed their power (Gadamer 1975: 250-360).

It would be easy to misinterpret Gadamer or to infer the wrong conclusions from his work. From Gadamer’s assertion that understanding is always socially and historically constituted, we should not infer that researchers, like other individuals, have a philosophical licence simply to impose their categories and presuppositions on what they study. We have seen earlier how the social cartography model adopts this erroneous view of research, projecting as it does theoretical categories onto the empirical material, and thereby replicating and reinforcing them. As I have indicated in the above, the upshot of this representational perspective is a peculiar form of theoretical ossification whereby empirical material is devalued and treated as simply an instantiation of the theoretical framework to which the research is wedded. In contrast, Gadamer’s notion of genuine understanding is quite different because it ties in with what I called self-understanding; that is with the recognition of one’s own fallibility and a willingness to learn and see things differently. Just like an authentic dialogue whereby participants are treated on an equal footing and are prepared to find out about other points of view, genuine understanding or Verständigung involves openness towards the unfamiliar and a willingness to learn from it in the hope of reaching an agreement. In a move which is particularly relevant to my argument about the significance of self-knowledge in social research, Gadamer contends that, in the case of genuine understanding, people are willing to recognise the validity and coherence of what is being studied to such an extent that this recognition might undermine some of their own presuppositions. In Gadamer’s terminology, understanding eventually leads to “self-formation” or Bildung, the process by which individuals and communities take on a larger perspective and realise the fallibility or parochial nature of beliefs they have hitherto cherished. Eventually, self-formation does not simply imply that people obtain knowledge of new forms of life but also that they acquire deftness in obtaining that type of knowledge. The gebildete culture is one in which people have acquired the ability to judge and discern (Gadamer 1975: 7-16, 77ff.).
Following on from Levinas’ mission to preserve the distinctiveness of the Other against ongoing attempts to assimilate it to the familiar, Gadamer’s dialogical perspective on understanding and his notion of Bildung tie in neatly with the concept of self-understanding that occupies such a central role in my pragmatist-inspired perspective. However, whereas Gadamer considers the relationship between understanding and self-understanding in ontological terms, my pragmatist-inspired perspective wants to exploit it methodologically. The question, then, is no longer whether understanding necessarily entails an element of self-understanding, but how to use this notion of self-understanding as a criterion to evaluate and judge social research, and, conversely, which methodological strategies can be conceived to bring about this reflexive stance. As shown elsewhere, genealogical historians, post-processual archaeologists and the exponents of the critical turn in anthropology have been effective in pursuing self-understanding in this sense (Baert 2005: 157-165), though it is worth emphasising they have done so within the specific intellectual climate in which they were writing, and that there is no guarantee that their methodological orientations will remain equally successful in the future or in a different context. So to appeal for a methodological reading of the dialogical notion of understanding is not to invoke yet another elusive neutral algorithm, but it is to be sensitive to the cultural importance of self-knowledge and the central role the social sciences can play in this, and to reflect on the methodological strategies which in a given context are well suited for this purpose. The picture that emerges is one in which social research is seen as an encounter with otherness, potentially facilitating or encouraging a community to reflect on its presuppositions, including those that underlie the research. In contrast with traditional philosophy of social science that has little regard for self-edification, my appeal for a gebildete research revolves around the importance of the broadening of people’s perspectives.

Social research, reflexivity and societal engagement

In contrast to their contemporaries in Vienna and Cambridge, classical pragmatists, like Dewey and Mead, wanted philosophy and the social sciences to engage with the social world, to make it a richer, more diverse and altogether more interesting place. Dewey’s contributions to educational theory are a case in point, and so is the sociological research conducted by members of the Chicago School (see, for instance, Abbot 1999, Joas 1993). These examples show philosophy and the social sciences at their best, interacting with and learning from the external world, and attempting to give something back to the communities that are being studied. Since then the further institutionalisation of academics within university establishments and the intense professionalisation of the social sciences has led to quite a different set-up (see, for instance, Jacoby 1986). This shift has certainly not been altogether negative, bringing legitimacy and outside recognition, securing improved work conditions and setting rigorous standards of intellectual quality. However, in relation to the initial pragmatist ambitions about the relationship between knowledge and practice, those institutional transformations have meant that intellectual legitimacy and academic recognition have become stronger priorities than practical engagement. Whereas earlier sociologists addressed significant political and social concerns, the upshot of the structural changes is that social scientists increasingly address other social scientists and that their language and intellectual interests reflect and reinforce this narrowing of horizons.

Against this backdrop, my argument for a new way of thinking about social research, centred around an integration of American neo-pragmatism and Continental philosophy, acquires an element of urgency. In contrast with the academic setting today, social research
in pursuit of self-understanding encourages researchers to be sufficiently open to the unfamiliar, to take a broader perspective and reflect on the world we took for granted hitherto. This type of research is about expanding our imaginative canvas and practical reach, something to be achieved by learning from and reaching out to those beyond the safe contours of the academy.

My argument in particular shows affinities with Michael Burawoy’s recent plea for a “public sociology”, which uses expert knowledge to promote debate with and amongst various non-academic publics, thereby responding and adjusting to their demands and ultimately providing “dialogue” and “mutual education” (Burawoy 2004; 2005). Burawoy compares his notion of “organic” public sociology with “traditional” public sociology: whereas the latter addresses an amorphous, invisible and mainstream public, the former actively engages with a specific, visible and politically organised group of people. Both forms of public sociology can perfectly coexist and indeed feed into each other, but Burawoy argues particularly in favour of the organic version because its political mandate is better articulated, it has clearer direction and its practical pay-off is less ambiguous. Public sociology, so he argues, is not only different from mainstream “professional sociology” but also from “policy sociology”. While policy sociology attempts to provide technical answers to questions provided by an external client, public sociology develops a “dialogic relationship” between sociology and the public whereby the issues of each partner are brought to the attention of the other, and each adjusts or responds accordingly. Whereas both professional and policy sociology construct “instrumental knowledge”, public sociology shares with “critical sociology” a preoccupation with “reflexive knowledge” or “dialogue about ends”. Public sociology should not be conflated with critical sociology, however: whereas both professional and critical sociology target an academic audience, public sociology, like policy sociology, embarks on a dialogue with non-academic publics about the “normative foundations” of society.

While Burawoy’s passionate argument for a more socially engaged sociology is appealing and indeed has obtained worldwide attention, he focuses mainly on the actual practical engagement of sociologists with their publics. Less attention is given to exploring the type of knowledge acquisition involved in the kind of reflexive sociology which he promotes. Following the distinction by the Frankfurt School between substantive and instrumental rationality, Burawoy differentiates reflexive sociology from policy sociology on the basis that it establishes goals and values rather than means. But this definition remains notoriously vague, especially given that what counts as a value in one context can be a means for acquiring a value in a different context. Meta-theoretical discussions about the future of the discipline of sociology, as the debate around public sociology certainly is, need to be accompanied by philosophical explorations of the methodological issues involved. Otherwise the arguments presented have a hollow ring to them and can easily be dismissed as mere statements of intent, devoid of any substance.

The pragmatist-inspired proposal, outlined here – with its rejection of foundationalism, naturalism and representationalism, its emphasis on self-understanding, and its exploration of the link between knowledge and action – provides the right philosophical backing to support and define the type of social scientific knowledge that engages with groups and communities outside the safe contours of the ivory tower. However, this is not to say that the Gadamerian dialogical model of knowledge, for which I have been arguing, is solely relevant for non-academic publics. Social research in the pursuit of self-understanding cuts right across Burawoy’s distinction between critical and public sociology because the reflex-
ivity that is built in affects presuppositions that are held within academic as well as non-academic communities.

This is particularly clear in the case of Zygmunt Bauman’s *Modernity and the Holocaust* (1991) – a prime example of the type of research I have in mind. This not only invites a broader non-academic audience to rethink the nature of the atrocities during the Third Reich, but also challenges some of the presuppositions sociologists and philosophers hold about the value, the possibilities and the dangers of the transition towards modernity. Challenging the *Sonderweg* thesis and opposing the orthodox view that modernity and the Holocaust are antithetical, Bauman persuasively argues that key features of modernity – the “garden” notion of the nation-state, and a process of bureaucratisation with its increasing instrumental rationality and decreasing sense of individual responsibility – were necessary conditions for the emergence of the Holocaust. By doing so, Bauman goes further than arguing against the popular conception that the atrocities committed during that period were somehow irrational outbursts or indicative of the fact that the project of modernity had not quite been accomplished. Crucially, his analysis also implies that sociologists ought to reassess their views about the project of modernity itself, a reassessment which ultimately affects how they conceive of their own discipline, entrenched as it is in the Enlightenment vision. In short, this example indicates that, in practice, the rigid distinction between Baudrillard’s critical and public sociology may be less relevant than he assumes it is. This is because any substantial dialogical knowledge, of the kind I have been arguing for and which Bauman epitomises, will be relevant to both academic and non-academic communities.

**Conclusion**

This paper has sought to demonstrate the fruitfulness of an ongoing dialogue between American neo-pragmatism and Continental philosophy, which, for far too long, have been regarded as addressing irreconcilable intellectual concerns. It has explored the affinities which exist between my own neo-pragmatist agenda in the field of philosophy of the social sciences, and the philosophical outlook developed by Sartre, Levinas and Gadamer. Rather than conceiving of social research as, primarily, an explanatory or predictive endeavour, I have shown that this neo-pragmatist view promotes social research in terms of an ongoing engagement with otherness, a process which ultimately contributes to the pursuit of richer forms of collective re-description. In this view, research takes a central role in the ability of communities to distance themselves from their hitherto unacknowledged presuppositions, to assume different points of view and, ultimately, to make a difference to the social world which those communities have helped to create and which they inhabit. This neo-pragmatist approach, I have argued, presents a philosophical basis for the reflexive knowledge entailed in both critical and public sociology.

One final issue needs to be addressed. As my neo-pragmatist perspective aims to contribute to the philosophy of the social sciences, the question inevitably arises which theories are well (or ill-) suited to bringing about the reflexivity which I have been advocating? From the above, it should be clear that my answer is that, unlike other philosophies of social science such as falsificationism or critical realism, this pragmatist-inspired proposal is neutral vis-à-vis theory choice in so far as it refuses to invoke external criteria – such as falsifiability, explanatory power or predictive success – to decide on the value of a given theory. Instead, it suggests that we should take into account the context of the dominant presuppositions of the discipline or indeed of a community at large before evaluating the theory under consideration because it is only against this background that such an evalua-
tion can be achieved. Alfred Schutz’s notion of “stock of knowledge at hand” is particularly applicable here because it captures very well how, in their everyday life, people approach the social world in terms of “familiarity and pre-acquaintanceship” (Schutz and Luckmann 1973). Just as everyday life is embedded in the Lebenswelt – a world of everyday life governed by the “natural attitude” – social researchers take for granted a number of theoretical and metaphysical beliefs and methodological strategies. It follows from the above that theories ought to be evaluated on the basis of how much of a Gestalt-switch they manage to bring about – how much they could bring researchers to rethink those hitherto deeply entrenched and often unacknowledged presuppositions. In opposition to the ritualistic hero-worship, which is so endemic in the social sciences today and which is tied in with the representational model of social researcher, the pragmatist-inspired perspective calls for less deference and bolder claims – an intellectual iconoclasm of sorts. The question should no longer be how we can apply the works of our intellectual heroes or preferred models (whatever they are) to the empirical data, but how we can learn from the encounter with the unfamiliar to challenge them and think differently.

References


Eugene Halton

Pragmatic E-Pistols

Abstract. If pragmatists conceive of thought as an internal dialogue, then why not externalize that thought as a dialogue in the form of letters to the major pragmatists concerning their ideas in the contemporary world. This piece consists of letters fired off to William James, Charles Peirce, George Herbert Mead, and John Dewey, concerning key ideas from each and how these ideas relate to contemporary social thought.

Queries are posed concerning what modifications of pragmatists’ ideas might be needed today, how, for example, Charles Peirce’s semiotic became known through the systematic misinterpretations of Charles Morris, how Peirce’s view of science as disconnected from practical life and Dewey’s view of society as requiring a model of inquiry derived from science might be reframed today, in the age of scientism; how William James’s critique of science as unnecessarily excluding “the personality as a condition of events” might be reconciled with Peirce and contemporary outlooks; how Dewey’s aesthetic theory and public philosophy address contemporary issues; how George Herbert Mead’s idea of the generalized other might be critically refined in a time when what I term “the mechanical other” seems predominant, and what the evolutionary origins of the generalized other might be. The form of the letter not only provides a way to illustrate the dialogical nature of thought, but also to highlight how pragmatist ideas continue in dialogue with contemporary life, and to do so with panache: not simply epistles, but e-pistols.

Pistolets are the best Artillerie.
And they who write to Lords, rewards to get,
Are they not like singers at doors for meat?
John Donne

To William James

Dear William,

I am a student of pragmatism, and I must begin with an apology. For some time I did not take your writing as seriously as I should have, probably because of your conception of pragmatism. I am still of the opinion that you misunderstood Peirce, that what you took to be obscurity on his part was, in fact, his carefulness in his choice of words and delimitation of ideas. Peirce, as you know, considered himself a “laboratory philosopher”, and he forged a far-reaching conception of science at odds, in many ways, with the very fabric of modern thought. It is interesting to me how each of you developed philosophies of purport, not only in pragmatism, but in your conceptions of science and of its place in society as well.

A Nobel Prize winner, Jacque Monod, exemplified the extreme opposite position concerning science, perhaps, when he claimed that, “The cornerstone of the scientific method
is...the systematic denial that ‘true’ knowledge can be reached by interpreting phenomena in terms of final causes – that is to say, of ‘purpose’...The ancient covenant is in pieces: man at last knows that he is alone in the unfeeling immensity of the universe, out of which he emerged by chance” (Monod, 1974: 30, 167). And Bertrand Russell, in his 1946 book *History of Western Philosophy*, says, “In the welter of conflicting fanaticisms, one of the few unifying forces is scientific truthfulness, by which I mean the habit of basing our beliefs upon observations and inferences as impersonal, and as much divested of local and temperamental bias, as is possible for human beings...The habit of careful veracity acquired in the practice of this philosophical method can be extended to the whole sphere of human activity, producing, wherever it exists, a lessening of fanaticism with an increasing capacity of sympathy and mutual understanding. In abandoning a part of its dogmatic pretensions, philosophy does not cease to suggest and inspire a way of life” (Russell, 1946: 744).

Ah, the age of enlightened modernism, when intellect thought that its “impersonal” scientific rationale would inspire a way of life with increased “sympathy and mutual understanding” to “the whole sphere of human activity”, instead of dehumanization. It thought that by removing the personal, the local, the temperamental, you could remove the fanatic. It did not understand that it was simply removing some of the human anchors of sanity, so as to make it easier for fanaticism to re-emerge, disguised in the clothing of cold, truth seeking hyper-rationality: truth seeking in means, indifferent as to ends: call me Ahab, as Melville put it, “all my means are sane, my motive and my object mad”.

Russell published his words the year after World War 2 ended, the year after science developed the first atomic bombs that were used by the United States to kill hundreds of thousands of Japanese, dropped on them from heavenly heights. His book was published by George Allen and Unwin in London, a city that had been rained on by German V-2 rockets, compliments of rocket science.

How vastly different Russell’s words were from yours, when you said, “The only form of thing that we directly encounter, the only experience that we concretely have, is our own personal life...And this systematic denial on science’s part of personality as a condition of events, this rigorous belief that in its own essential and innermost nature our world is a strictly impersonal world, may, conceivably, as the whirligig of time goes round, prove to be the very defect that our descendants will be most surprised at in our own boasted science, the omission that to their eyes will most tend to make it look perspectiveless and short” (James, 1986: 166).

Times’ whirligig has gone around, William, to prove your words and disprove Russell’s. Now admittedly, you don’t give as much critical thought in your work to the place of institutions in the operating of society as might be called for. But your words here offer a profound critique of modern science and technology. The extension “to the whole sphere of human activity” of an impersonal intelligence, as Russell would have it, has not proved to be the mark of science proper, but of science in the thrall of the depersonalizing machine. That is why I find your allowance for the person and for the qualities of life in your account of science and society to be of such value, and why I seek to reconcile them with Peirce’s philosophy of science. Peirce did see that science is not sufficient for the practice of life because it does not go deeply enough to the whole passionate being required for the practice of life. It is why he reserved science for theoretical life, and why, in his “Vitally Important Questions” lectures of 1898, he disdained science in the service of practical questions. This is also why he noted the difference in the meanings of “pragmatic” and “practical”, and why his pragmatism is not, as he put it, a “practicalism”, whereas yours is.
As you put it in *Pragmatism*: “The whole function of philosophy ought to be to find out what definite difference it will make to you and me, at definite instants of our life, if this world-formula or that world-formula be the true one” (James, 1977: 379). Though it is true that practical decisions often need to be based on beliefs and “gut” feelings which produce the “definite difference” you mention, Peirce’s claim is that theoretical life can only be based on fallible *opinions*, always subject to correction within the unlimited community of inquiry. So pragmatic meaning is found, as he put it elsewhere, “not in a particular experiment, but in *experimental phenomena*”, (Peirce, 1938: Vol. 5 § 425)¹. In my opinion Peirce got that one right, and your version of pragmatism does not. But I do think that you are addressing the relation of ideas to practical life, which has been a source of great misunderstanding in the modern era. George Bernard Shaw put it this way in his 1930 toast to Albert Einstein: “Science is always wrong. It never solves a problem without creating 10 more”. Now he may have been hyperbolizing, because science clearly gets so many things right. But he points to something that can be taken positively as how scientific findings generate new inquiries, or negatively, of how a precise answer to a particular problem may be wrongly generalized in practical life to produce a hydra-head of unanticipated consequences worse than the original problem.

It was through a scholar named Lewis Mumford that I first came across your term “vicious intellectualism”, a term that has been close to my heart for many years. In my experience many academic intellectuals (that subspecies of intellectuals with the “three magic letters”, Ph.D., as you put it in your essay “The Ph.D. Octopus”) do not take the “life” part of intellectual life seriously, and their intellectual prowess was gained at the cost of infantilized emotions. It probably was their way of surviving childhood. The effect is to put powerful brains at the service of infantilized emotions, and institutionally this is how bureaucracy is spelled. It is the infant enwrapped in modern rationalization: cognitive facilities hyper-developed, emotional and empathic abilities diminished or even disabled as a virtual system requirement. To me intellect is that discriminating (meaning “to choose between”) aspect of intelligence, capable of determining purport, which is only one kind of intelligence. There is also the more Russian term “intelligentsia”, which has a broader connotation, inclusive of the arts as well as the critical capacities. But that sense almost seems to be a target for vicious intellectuals, who want their world pigeonholed.

A more primary, yet sorely neglected, intelligence is what I’d call “bodying forth” intelligence, creatively conceiving, or perhaps what William Blake meant by Poetic Imagination. These facets of spontaneous, live to the moment intelligence don’t seem to figure into the social sciences that much these days, even in, if you could imagine it, the study of art. But you put it so well when you said, “Our intelligence cannot wall itself up alive, like a pupa in its chrysalis. It must at any cost keep on speaking terms with the universe that engendered it” (James, 1977a: 556). Here, it seems to me, you are of a piece with Peirce’s semiotic realism. Being on speaking terms with the engendering universe may very well entail an engendering consciousness alive in awareness to the moment, creatively attuning to what you called, as I first heard from philosopher Bruce Wilshire, the “much-at-once”, rather than habitually calculating.

You know, William, I’ve always felt that you and your brother Henry were somehow crossed in your cradles; that you were really the artist-writer on the inside, while Henry was the psychologist. I realize I may just be talking to myself, but in my inner life I admire your palpable presence in your writing, just as I admire Peirce’s perspicacity, and hope to catch a little of each in what I write.

Yours sincerely,

Gene Halton

To George Herbert Mead

Dear George,

In your 1925 essay on “The Genesis of the Self and Social Control” you say: “But it is not necessary that we should talk to another to have these ideas. We can talk to ourselves, and this we do in the inner forum of what we call thought. We are in possession of selves just insofar as we can and do take the attitudes of others toward ourselves and respond to those attitudes…Our thinking is an inner conversation in which we may be taking the roles of specific acquaintances over against ourselves, but usually it is with what I have termed the ‘generalized other’ that we converse” (Mead, 1925: 272). I wish to put those words to work in this letter to you.

First, I have some good news and some bad news. The good news is that you have been accepted into the sociological canon; your work has become part of the sociological liturgy, so to speak, with obligatory genuflections. Ironically, your work as a pragmatist philosopher has been largely ignored by philosophers, who seldom include you in discussions of pragmatists, despite a revival of interest in pragmatism since the 1960s. Dewey has come back big, but you, despite the affinity of many of your ideas with Dewey’s, remain curiously peripheral to professional academic philosophers. Go figure!

One of the ways your work on mind, self and society remains relevant to social science today is that it is able to include the subjective elements of experience, without resorting to dualism of individual versus social, and to frame this in the context of a democratic philosophy. I find this both in yours and Dewey’s social psychologies and theories of democracy. Democracy does not begin in subjectivity; it begins in a common life. It, like chickens and eggs, does not start with isolate individuals who discover the common, but in the common life through which individuals arise, as you showed particularly well in your essay. There you state: “…we realize that each individual has a world that differs in some degree from that of any other member of the same community, that he slices the events of the community life that are common to all from a different angle from that of any other individual…It is this recognition that takes psychology out of its isolation, as a science that deals with what is found in the mind of an individual, and makes of it the standpoint from which to approach reality as it is going on” (Mead, 1925: 260).

Subjectivity is an element of a common life, from a democratic perspective. Human subjectivity is primordially an internalization of community, arising in early biocultural socialization developmentally, as you showed in your discussions of the play stage leading to the “game”, but already primed for development in the human genome and individual temperament, as more recent research has confirmed.

Or consider this: the subject arises in relation to the rise of objects, developmentally. The child’s discovery of a world of objects, of others, is a developmental process in which the subject is discovered as well; in effect, is extricated from the process. “It is and I am” is...
no given, but a developmental achievement. It is a biosocial construction involving the internalization of a community of animate objects, some of which are human. Not only is the subject social, but the objective object is also social. It may have its individual existence as well, but its reality is intrinsically social, as an element of the interpretive act, of communicative conduct, of semiosis.

Your developmental view of the self remains interesting to consider in the light of theories of social constructionism, which claim selves and societies are solely conventional constructions. Kenneth Gergen is a psychologist who has argued for a postmodern view of the self as “relational”, as simply constructed by the conventions of the culture. His view illustrates the anaemic understanding of signs prevalent today as limited to conventional signification, incapable of allowing more modalities of signification, for example, your discussion of what Wundt originally termed, “the conversation of gestures”, as prelinguistic, preconventional signification.

These ideas of social constructionism derive from older traditions. Earlier Georg Simmel, for example, was working out of the Kantian tradition, making the distinction of form and content, and with an idea that sociology is the study of forms of interaction. His sociology is formal, studying forms, not contents, of interaction. Kant’s outlook was that the human faculty of knowing gives form to the otherwise formless content of the manifold of experience. One can read this as the mind gives form to experience, or constructs the world. Kant’s nominalist outlook entails a divide between form and content, nature and culture, world and mind. You and the other pragmatists rejected that way of dividing things.

Even earlier, Hobbes took philosophical nominalism into political and social thought, reversing Aristotle by claiming an individualistic “state of nature”, “...a condition of Warre of every one against every one”, which required a social contract for there to be society. This view of the social as conventional and as divorced from nature entails a view that society is a non-natural construction. You and the other pragmatists rejected this way of dividing things as well, seeking a philosophical continuity of nature and culture. Peirce’s semiotic maps out a range of signs beyond simply conventional, as does your discussion of the development of the self.

Once you admit natural signification as more encompassing than conventional signification, though still admitting the wide range of conventional signification, you open up possibilities that yes, there are social constructions that can be arbitrary, but that there can also be social constructions that may be the result of natural constructions as well. The very earliest socialization of the infant with its mother/caretaker involves wired-in behaviors of attunement by the infant deriving from its subcortical brain, which are read as intelligible signs by the mother/caretaker, which furthers the socializing attunement and dance between them, which in turn furthers later cortical development and interaction by the infant. The result is a social construction of the self, but one in which natural constructing signification is a key element. This process is unavailable to the Hobbesian, Kantian, and contemporary arbitrary social constructionist outlooks, as well as to those of pure biological reductivisms, which deny the place of communicative socialization, but can be easily understood by Peirce’s and your perspectives.

That newborn infant’s facial attunement to its mother, deriving from the limbic system of its subcortical brain, is a good example of how “conversation of gestures” can occur in significant human transactions. Through the mother’s mimicking responses of attunement, the pair can “dance” the infant into cortical interaction, developing later, through gestural play, into the development of the significant symbol, where child learns to indicate to self and other simultaneously, through internal dialogue with the generalized other.
Mirror neurons, an area of brain cells discovered in the premotor cortex of macaque monkeys in 1996, suggest a physiological basis for a “looking-glass” self along the lines of Cooley and your and Peirce’s discussions. They fire not only when the monkey performs an action, but also when the monkey observes the same action performed by another: monkey see, monkey do. And more, they also reflect the sensations and emotions of the other. They form a neural basis of mind-reading, and evidence suggests a relation between deficits in mirror neurons and autism. I find it interesting that the technical discovery of the physiology has received so much attention, while your theory of how becoming a self through developing a generalized other as a basis for thought and conduct illustrated back then what is simply being confirmed today. In other words, mirror neurons provide a physiological confirmation of your theory, rather than being a wholly new idea.

Back in your time Freud thought that psychoanalysis would eventually give way to neurology. Today, many cognitive scientists similarly think psychological and sociological phenomena will give way to neuroscience. But it might come out happier than that dismal form of reductionism: social theories of mind and of empathic social relation such as yours, Cooley’s and Peirce’s can suggest ways for cognitive science to emerge from its “black box” model of isolate brain, while simultaneously being informed by its findings. The body-mind is a biosocial reality, not reducible to the machine model which has dominated modern neuroscience. The machine model can be useful, but it is partial, and cannot encompass spontaneous, generative minding.

The reality of a self is not its existence, but its intelligibility as a sign. Signs involve existence, but are not reducible to existence, for their being lies in their being interpreted in a future interpretation; in continuing semeiosis. So that a self or a sign has a reality at any given moment as a potential existence, in Peirce’s terms.

Modern materialism would consider all of this reducible to actual existence. Peirce claimed that such a nominalist way of thinking, shaving off generality in the name of Ockham’s razor, actually cuts its own throat and ultimately renders science inexplicable. What if the modern era and its earnest scientists have been working for the myth of the machine, projecting the subjective clockwork culture of their time onto the objective universe, truly discovering with the precision of William Blake’s painting of Newton, the truth of the single-visioned part, while sacrificing the vision of the whole reality? Blake’s Newton, supple but hunched over his compass, blindered to his surrounds, is a visualization of the paradox of accurate viewing of the part and blindness to the whole. To put this in Peircean terms, modern science is corrupt in its nominalism, treating the reality of generals, which are the basis of its life, as unreal.

This brings me to another point. While your concept of the generalized other remains a fruitful way to understand the development of the self, it seems to me time to update it. You pictured a democratic model of the generalized other. Yet the modern world picture has been dominated by the machine, by the universe as a giant clock, and more recently the brain as a computer. These are not simply empty metaphors, but living symbols of the myth of our time, namely, that ultimately reality is a kind of machine, and we but parts of it. The mythic element in this is the idealization of the machine as defining nature, of the automatic, and the simultaneous denigration of the spontaneous. And George, the machine model is not democratic, quite the opposite. It is an alienation of human purport, of the automatic portions of purport expansively projected out (ironically, in the name of anti-teleological and even anti-mythical) as virtual deity substitute. Today that imago has come to dominance in the diffusion of technology and its colonization of the self through a plethora of devices.
And so I have termed this pervasive model that gets into the socialization process the mechanical other. It is meant to draw attention to how the modern world picture, far from being anti-teleological, has as its purpose the colonization and replacement of those supreme gifts of our organic, sensing and signifying nature by dictates of the automaton. As I argued in my book, The Great Brain Suck, it is not so much a process of brain-washing as soft brain-rinsing through pleasurable distractions. I also introduced a new term to add to Cooley’s primary and secondary relations, which I call “tertiary relations”. If primary is face-to-face, and secondary is person to role, tertiary is person-machine mediated relations. When tertiary relations predominate social relations, to the point of displacing primary and even secondary relations, the generalized other manifests as the mechanical other, role model for developing the automaton within, a compliant servant of the power system. Your idea of the generalized other as the internalized community rooted in democratic ideals provides an alternative.

In my view it may be precisely the deep-rooted organic abilities for what I term self-originated experience that can ultimately offset a culture of automatism. But this has led me to further modification of your idea of the generalized other, namely, a consideration of the possible genesis of the generalized other. Your view treats the human socializing agents: parents, playmates, both imaginary and actual, and broader human community. I think the original generalized other went further; that it was primarily wild, and significantly non-human.

Dramatic and ritual-like processes percolate deep from our bio-semiotic nature, including the subcortical brain. One might say that semiosis was the primary “tool” that begat humans, not the reverse, in the two million year trajectory toward the emergence of symbolic signification. We emerged through an environment alive with signs, ranging from mother and clan to the non-human others to whom we paid the closest attention. It was by attuning to the others without and within, including the non-human wild others, that we found ourselves. Your developmental theory, like most other developmental accounts, seems to me hampered by anthropocentrism in this regard, in limiting the evolution of the socializing process to human participants and excluding the profound significance of the revered community of life. They were the actual wild others as well as imagined others in play and ritual who coaxed us into the significant symbol. They were what were on our emergent minds as we painted them on the walls of the caves tens of thousands of years ago.

It was especially through the animal others, the original others of the mind’s I, as Paul Shepard pointed out, that we emerged as the degenerate monkeys we are (if you will excuse my Peirce-onification of homo sapiens sapiens). Peirce coined the term “degenerate monkey” by way of alluding to human prolonged neoteny, new-born like characteristics. We are biologically determined to our peculiar human ways of signification, involving prolonged neoteny, the loosening up of instinctive determination coevolving with greater communicative and cooperative social signification.

Proto-human ritual “conversations of gestures” became self-aware ritualizing communications, and these were the most basic tools through which we bootstrapped ourselves into humankind, of far greater significance than stone tools. That is why drama must be compelling to be convincing, something more than simply “dramatic effect” or social construction: it retains the full play of our organic, gesturing complexus of signs, natured and nurtured over hundreds of millennia.

Perhaps the first person, the first avatar of the symbol, was the wild other, impersonated. Impersonation goes far deeper than simply wearing a mask (persona). The self as
persona/mask suggests spectator consciousness rather than participation consciousness, and a separation of the enactor from the enacted. That is indeed what occurred in civilization in the emergence of theater from ritual. But the human person originally emerged as participant in the social, transformative ritual drama of what Paul Shepard called “the sacred game”, with a play on game as play, and on prey and predator relation. The human person emerged from transformative transactions with the signifying beings in the evolutionary drama of life and death. Those transactions made for good eating, good inferencing, good ways for thinking the world and revering it (Shepard, 1998).

As Peirce put it: “Something of the general nature of personality there is in all general ideas. These conceptions are in a certain sense creations of the human intelligence, but in another aspect the human mind is the creation of these conceptions working together. These general conceptions are no figments, they are real things – more than that, they are living beings with something like life and something like personality. Mind acts upon mind by virtue of its continuity; and this continuity involves generality” (MS 954). And in this sense the generality being internalized from habitat significations eventually became incorporated as the capability for the generalized other that constitutes the significant symbol in your sense. And this is why I think it was originally predominantly wild. In impersonating the wild other, ingesting its character and gestures as we ingested its body, we incorporated the intelligence of the ecological mind as the inner vocabulary of the human self: ways of hunting, tracking, ways of camouflage and moving, ways of being. Our minds were created in the creaturing of our minds by the wild others we encountered.

So far as we told ourselves what we learned from the instinctive genius of the animals and plants, revering them, we found the ways to mature our dematured, “degenerate monkey”, selves. But when, walled off in human-centered cities, we began to tell ourselves what we learned from ourselves, revering our projections of ourselves as gods, we began that well-known tale, told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing. The tall tale of the degenerate monkey: the mask of Civilization and its fruits of increased social inequality, work load, poorer nutrition, famine, mass killing warfare, and other niceties not usually included in describing what it means to be “civilized”. De-animalization of human consciousness by anthropocentrism coincided with the beginnings of dehumanization (Halton 2007).

Considered in the context of Peirce’s discussions of instinctive genius, those signs of life to which traditional foraging humans interpretively attune, attune us to the instinctive genius of ecological mind. That attunement is not only requisite for dematured primates with prolonged neoteny, namely, we degenerate monkeys, but is also the genius of panzooism (a term I’ve borrowed from John Stuart Stuart-Glennie, adding my own context), the emergent worldview of practical and reverential attunement to life, which bodied us forth into our human body-minds.

In that same essay of yours on “The Genesis of the Self and Social Control”, you also said something rather unfortunate: “I can only refer to the bearing of this childish play attitude upon so-called sympathetic magic. Primitive men call out in their own activity some simulacrum of the response which they are seeking from the world about. They are children crying in the night” (Mead, 1925: 269-270).

I’m sorry to say that your progressivism prevented you from fully considering the intelligence of ecological mind as that primarily addressed in “so-called sympathetic magic” by so-called “primitive men”. When one addresses, through mimesis, through ritualizing dance or song or story, the wild generalized other that is the ecological mind, there is real intelligence deriving from habitat in the dialogue, however fantastically the dialogue be clothed.
Not that there is not also human projection that occurs as well, as a monologue functioning as a simulacrum of dialogue. But there is also valuable practical significance to ruminating over the conduct of creatures one may be hunting tomorrow, for example, or dancing them as a way into their movements, gestures and minds.

Such conversations of gestures, through ritual, engaged our ancestors into humankind over the course of evolution. Yet at a certain point, we distanced ourselves from the wild others through domestication, to our great loss in the long run. Dematured primates such as ourselves may require matured wild others as “role models”, something the full instinctive intelligence of wild others could provide, but the dematured intelligence of domesticates we surrounded ourselves with in agricultural civilization could not. We gave it up at our peril. As Ralph Waldo Emerson told it: “The end of the human race will be that it will eventually die of civilization”.

Speaking of wild, I heard that you and Sergei Prokoviev had to escape a police raid on a card game you both were involved in when he was in Chicago for the premiere of his opera, “Love of Three Oranges”. Is that true?

Yours truly,

Gene Halton

To John Dewey

Dear John,

I am writing as someone who has drawn from a number of your ideas, and who remains appreciative of them, yet harbors misgivings about your larger view of things. In my opinion you remain a vital source of ideas for social science today, and so I would like to review some reasons why I think so and then go on to criticize your larger perspective as insufficient to comprehend the devitalizing forces at large today.

One aspect of your philosophy that remains underappreciated is the aesthetic theory you developed in your 1934 book *Art as Experience*. There you finally fleshed out your idea of the consummatory phase of conduct, as well as the place of qualitative, felt experience you had elaborated earlier in *Experience and Nature*. You silenced some of the critics of your instrumentalism who argued that it was a mere utilitarian conception of conduct by describing aesthetic experience as the consummation of the act, in which the qualitative aspect of the act itself, rather than the act as a means to an end, is prominent. Any given act of interpretation may have both elements simultaneously.

You showed how aesthetic experience is neither simply subjective nor objective, but is the pervasive quality of the act, felt or “had” rather than known by the expericer. Having an aesthetic experience is far more general than experiencing art: all experience potentially involves an aesthetic element or perspective. But this does not mean, as, composer John Cage would say, that all experience is art. One can have an aesthetic experience of chance sounds without that being an aesthetic experience of music, contra Cage. In my own study of *The Meaning of Things* (1981), the objects respondents described most often as holding aesthetic meanings were houseplants, not art, because the qualities of the plants themselves most often evoked their meaning, rather than indirect social meanings, such as “it was a wedding present” or “we got it on vacation”, which many art objects signified.

Your distinction brings out what to me seems one of the strengths of pragmatism: a full-bodied theory of meaning that not only accounts for conventional signification, but is able to encompass qualitative, experiential, and even symbolic modalities of signification that
are extraconventional. Your qualitative element of signification and Peirce’s iconic sign allow the sign a presence, unlike the French semiological tradition of meaning as differential, where a sign’s meaning is determined by its difference from other signs in the system.

Contemporary social science has been flooded with social constructionist theories of meaning, which hold that meaning is an arbitrary or conventional system. In more extreme forms in postmodernism, meaning is regarded as purely conventional, and the place of experience and nature, of qualitative and indexical modalities of signs, of biosocial aspects of self and society, of signs capable of real purport, of reality itself, are all denied. A self-proclaimed Deweyan pragmatist by the name of Richard Rorty held such views, leading me to proclaim him a fragmatist rather than a pragmatist (Halton 1995). One of the ironies in the radical postmodern ideologies is that in the name of a kind of “everything is permitted” perspective, signification and interpretation are tightly constricted to the realm of the conventional or contingent. For such reasons I view it as an embodiment of contemporary techno-consumptive capitalism, rather, as many of its adherents seem to believe, an alternative.

One of the key elements of your aesthetic theory that I have found insightful in understanding conduct is your distinction between perception and recognition. Recognition, in your sense, uses already internalized, habitualized schema to interpret, whereas perception goes further to bring those schema to meet the felt situation, so that the interpretation is influenced by the qualities of the situation – or work – being interpreted, and so that the schemas of interpretation one brings to a situation are potentially enlivened or modified by that act. One learns as one interprets in an aesthetic act, and this is one way, in the narrower zone of art, in which art is connected to life and provides vitalizing and transcendent experience. More generally, the idea of perceptive experience opens for me a view of human conduct and social life as primarily centered in awareness rather than knowledge.

Aesthetic experience is not to be confused with effete distance from everyday practice, but as the very basis, through awareness as primary modality of consciousness, to connect to the evolutionary roots of generalizing awareness through which we evolved into these human bodies. Human symboling created virtual worlds of internalized schemas of interpretation, but to live by them, through recognition, instead of with them, through perception, would be a dangerous denial of engagement with the living habitat. In my opinion, John, we evolved through perceptive awareness, what Ortega y Gasset termed “omnivorous attention”. Now, it seems to me, we have installed a growing technoculture that selects for living by recognition, in commodified unawareness. You would surely be surprised at how America has become a nation of button pushers, how the world is pushing more and more buttons. This brings me to my next point.

Your work, especially in The Public and Its Problems, renewed the tradition of the public as a valid realm of conduct, not only necessary for maintaining vital, flourishing democracies, but also as a locus for everyday associative life. You brought into focus the problem of the privatization of the idea of the common good, something that modern thought seems to have lost because of its turning of subjectivity and emotions into what philosopher Alasdair Maclntyre called “emotivism”.

Another aspect of the dilemma appeared in your contrast of Royce’s idea of a Great Community (his “translation” of Peirce’s idea of the unlimited community of inquirers into a practical conception) to Graham Wallas’s conception of “the Great Society”, and Walter Lippmann’s use of it. Lippmann took a technocratic approach that the public is not real perse, but is only what he called The Phantom Public, managed by elites and mediating media. Yet as you put it, “Till the Great Society is converted into a Great Community, the Public
will remain in eclipse. Communication can alone create a great community” (1927: 144). Again, democracy as a common life requires informed citizens capable of more than being managed by elites.

You also say, “Our concern at this time is to state how it is that the machine age in developing the Great Society has invaded and partially disintegrated the small communities of former times without generating a Great Community...The local face-to-face community has been invaded by forces so vast, so remote in initiation, so far-reaching in scope and so complexly indirect in operation, that they are, from the standpoint of the members of the social units, unknown...An inchoate public is capable of organization only when indirect consequences are perceived, and when it is possible to project agencies which order their occurrence” (Dewey, 1927: 126-7, 129). Your words of 1927 remain even truer today, when vast multinational corporations have invaded and colonized the face-to-face community at every level.

Marx’s concerns with class and alienation become prominent: what would a class-differentiated, yet unalienated Great Community look like? Can one even call America a democracy today when the great society indicators loom ever larger: when CEO to average worker salary ratios are 25 to 1, when average CEO pay (adjusted for inflation) between 1990 and 2005 skyrocketed almost 300 percent, when in the twenty five years from 1980 to 2005 more than 80 percent of total increase in Americans’ income went to the top 1 percent? And what about the Republic of Fat as the democratization of alienation: everyone dislodged from their bodies by being encased in them: The Great Big Society!

In America, public life itself has been transformed by the appearance of privatized shopping malls, which have gutted local commerce in many towns and cities, while diminishing or even eradicating the public space as a locus of community life. But the private sphere has been colonized as well, moving way beyond the infusion of television that had already just started in your lifetime.

So much of America today, in its techno-depressive state, wishes to be invulnerable, liberated from the troublesome encounter with life that involves being vulnerable, being live. Masking itself in technicalism, technical solutions and new technology, virtualized home life through overuse of electronic devices, consumed Status Stuff, and an obesity epidemic, it has incarnated supersized perfections of anaesthesia: the mask of the living dead.

The ancient Greek polis, as Hannah Arendt pointed out, inherently involved the unique perspectives each citizen brought to it, in contrast to “society”, a medieval mistranslation of polis by Thomas Aquinas in Arendt’s view, which involves an aggregate. You saw this earlier, in The Public and Its Problems, when you said, “Associated or joint activity is a condition of the creation of a community. But association itself is physical and organic, while communal life is moral, that is, emotionally, intellectually, and consciously sustained...no amount of aggregated collective action by itself constitutes a community” (Dewey, 1927: 151). Aggregated collective action by itself is the hallmark of consumptive Isolatoism today, armored against community.

Contemporary capitalist democracy, so-called, emerged triumphant over communist democracy, so-called, at the end of the twentieth-century. As the joke had it, the difference between communism and capitalism is that in capitalism it is man’s inhumanity against man, but in communism it is completely the other way around. In the garrison state that was totalitarianism the rats were punished by negative conditioning. In “capitalist democracy” the rats are rewarded by positive conditioning. The latter has apparently proven a more successful method of conditioning rats to become docile to their conditioning, numb to their loss of freedom and autonomy, to their own mechanization and dehumanization. But a be-
numbed population of conditioned rats tends eventually to gnaw its way to the garrison state.

Democracy in your sense requires autonomous individuals capable of living for the common good, and a sense of the common good as capable of producing such individuals. Varieties of authoritarian societies – including capitalist oligarchies – require individuals and institutions subject to authoritarian good, yet not capable of determining it. They tend to select for automata instead of autonomy.

And yet democracy ends in a common good: the good life, as you strove to show. It is the valuing of the common life over the special interests of an individual or institution. To the extent that valuing is rooted in the practices of a common life it is a democratic life.

You sought to put a human face on science and technology, so that they could serve as instruments for the reconstruction of society. I am sympathetic to recovering these powers, which seem to have run amok like the brooms released in The Sorcerers’ Apprentice. But you seem to neglect, on the one side, Peirce’s valid claims that 1) science is primarily a theoretical affair concerned with the long run toward truth which the scientist serves, not the short term welfare of the scientist or society; and that 2) science does not go deep enough, limited as it is to opinion and not belief, to serve the interests of practical life, which require the availability of all the sentiments as well as practical judgment. On the other side, your championing of a broadened conception of scientific inquiry as the basis for democratic life still seems too narrow to encompass the necessary resources, even though your model remains broader and more humane than the “communicative rationality” machine constructed by Jürgen Habermas. You seem to leave so much out, or rather, to think that it can be squeezed into your inquiry model, as though other modalities are not good enough. Where does that “felt-sense” that leads to the problematic situation in which inquiry begins, as you showed so well, fit in to this? Or is there more?

So how about throwing some tender-hearted words into the tender-minded mix as well? Words like imaginative realism, or “the ART of political life”, or that reality of human being which is far more developed than our vaunted rational intellect, though explicitly targeted for destruction by the culture of narcissism that is perfecting itself globally these days: empathy.

I find it odd that you showed so clearly the place of qualitative immediacy and aesthetic experience in everyday life, yet give so little attention to how the sentiments, creative vitalities, and capabilities for passionate self-transcendence bodying forth from vital living rather than a perspective of critical inquiry, may reanimate the wider commonwealth that is our relation to ourselves, our families, neighbors, fellow citizens and fellow human beings. You allow art a place, but it seems to me a very tepid place. What is the place of simple face-to-face decency today, for example, or of trust and love?

A recently deceased politician and thinker named Vaclav Havel, the former president of the Czech Republic who I like to think of as a “Prague-matist”, spoke of this elegantly at Independence Hall, Philadelphia, on July 4, 1994, where the American Declaration of Independence and the United States Constitution were originally debated on and adopted, when he said: “Yes, the only real hope of people today is probably a renewal of our certainty that we are rooted in the earth and, at the same time, the cosmos. This awareness endows us with the capacity for self-transcendence. Politicians at international forums may reiterate a thousand times that the basis of the new world order must be universal respect for human rights, but it will mean nothing as long as this imperative does not derive from the respect of the miracle of Being, the miracle of the universe, the miracle of nature, the miracle of our own existence. Only someone who submits to the authority of the universal order and
of creation, who values the right to be a part of it and a participant in it, can genuinely value himself and his neighbors, and thus honor their rights as well”.

Why is it, John, that Herman Melville, in his great novel *Moby Dick*, saw clearly in 1851 into the consequences of “Isolatoism”, of the global disaster the modern Ahabian mindset would produce, the sinking of the world-ship in the mad quest for oil and “the phantom of life” itself? How is it that he also foresaw an alternative, found in the renewal of humble reconnection to the community of humankind and the earth, through Ishmael’s connection to his shipmate Queequeg?

My point is that real art bodies itself forth, whether understood in its time or not, through means other than inquiry. Critical thought is secondary to art. So perhaps thinkers fill in more critically what artists have felt expressively. Peirce’s theory of reality as intrinsically social and involving a community of interpretation has always seemed to me to develop logically what Melville expressed in *Moby Dick*: that Isolatoism is unviable in the long run, that the modern “islander” consciousness must reconnect to “the common continent” of humankind. So far so good. Only Melville, in my opinion, saw more clearly and even earlier than Peirce why Isolato islander nominalism is not simply a logical fallacy, but full suicide. And you seemed not to see this at all.

Let me turn this to another context. You wanted a social philosophy that could understand and reconstruct its times. But your understanding of the twentieth-century more broadly, despite astute observations on a number of issues, seems kind of anemic to me, tepid, and your writing is not lucid. I admire your transactional model of conduct, how meaning should be understood in the “context of the situation”, but one of its great shortcomings manifested in your idea that America should remain isolated from the emerging conflict with totalitarian Nazi Germany. That is why I have to side with your opponent, Lewis Mumford.

The titles of the brief contributions in Common Sense, March 1939, on the theme of “If War Comes--Shall We Participate or Remain Neutral?”, and on the eve of the war, say it all. Bertrand Russell’s is, “The Case for U.S. Neutrality”, yours is, “No Matter What Happens--Stay Out”, and Mumford’s is “Fascism is Worse than War”, meaning war was the lesser of two evils and that America should forcibly resist fascism. You stated: “If we but made up our minds that it is not inevitable, and if we now set ourselves deliberately to seeing that no matter what happens we stay out, we shall save this country from the greatest social catastrophe that could overtake us, the destruction of all the foundations upon which to erect a socialized democracy”.

The next few years proved Mumford right, and you and Russell wrong. You thought the European conflict was not the American “context of situation”, neglecting the larger civilizational context of situation. “No Matter what Happens” proved to be, as Mumford said it would, that Hitler would do exactly what he said he would do in *Mein Kampf* and would not be appeased under any circumstances. As Napoleon said, “Oh well, no matter what happens, there’s always death”.

Mumford may not have possessed your technical philosophical knowledge, and he lacked a sense of how significant class relations can be, but even so, his understanding of the times was far deeper, and his writing far more elevated than yours. Like you Mumford admired Emerson. But he embodies Emerson’s spirit far more than you. The essence of that spirit to me is unfettered outpouring of ideas. But Mumford also drew from Melville, and the other literary transcendentalists, and drew from darker intimations than you were able to feel. You seem fossilized today in contrast to Mumford, as I read each of you, yet you loom large because you were a pragmatist, and so have now been canonized by the academic in-
Industry. Mumford fit no disciplinary boundaries neatly, and though widely read in his time, has gone into partial eclipse. Perhaps as Emerson did for a time after his death.

My question is: why were you so wrong — idiotically wrong in saying that war was not inevitable yet deciding to stay out of it had to be—and why was Mumford so right? Perhaps you were still feeling burned about your pro World War 1 stance and were on the rebound. Still, I claim that Mumford was so right about that issue, and so much more right about the dark forces released in the twentieth-century in general than your bright, ardent outlook, because he allowed the full weight of his passions and emotions to inform his thinking at a more full-bodied level. You may have built a philosophy that allowed for a live social creature capable of experience – one deeper than many out there today, but it didn’t amount to a row of beans when it came time for you to come to grips with the mid-century madness, and still wouldn’t with the larger potential calamities primed to release today.

I am sorry I have to express such misgivings about the sustainability of your general outlook, but, despite my continuing admiration for a number of the ideas you developed, I simply needed to move on to more inclusive perspectives than your pragmatism could provide. Nonetheless, you remain a part of my inner community of thought, which includes a variety of perspectives I am grateful for being able to think with and draw from.

Yours sincerely,
Gene Halton

To Charles Peirce

Dear Charles,

I am a great fan of your philosophy, and felt that I need to write to you. The way you were so neglected in your time, while your ideas winged forth and were bent by others to fit the times, continues to appall me today. In the roughly hundred years since you died there has been good news and bad news. The good news is that your works survived a posthumous trip to the Harvard philosophy department hallways, where they sat too long, and even though some papers were removed and others taken out of order, collected works projects ensued and are still underway today. You are accepted as the founder of pragmatism, as one of the founders of semiotic, and as a source of ideas still being uncovered. It still is not widely known how you could be considered a key founder of mathematical logic, though work by John Sowa has now detailed that.

But the bad news includes the fact that your semiotic was distorted into positivism by Charles Morris, and that numerous theories going as semiotics, such as that of Ferdinand de Saussure, are based on the very nominalism your semiotic realism sought to disprove. Your ideas are still poorly misunderstood, but there appears to be growing interest in them.

You saw what they did to your pragmatism in your lifetime; fortunately you did not live to see what they did to your semiotic. Charles Morris, who was a student (and not a very good one) of John Dewey’s colleague and friend at Chicago, George Herbert Mead, was ironically a major force in undermining pragmatism and semiotic in the name of the glossy scientism of “logical empiricism”. That was a school of thought which stemmed from Vienna, based largely in applied misunderstandings of a philosopher named Ludwig Wittgenstein, who gave away his family fortune just as you were dying in dire poverty around 1914. Too bad you two couldn’t have met up then: He could have traded you his fortune for your mathematical logic and pragmaticism. As it happened, a friend and colleague of his,
Frank Ramsey, later introduced him to your thought and turned him around in his work, though Wittgenstein didn’t acknowledge your influence explicitly.

And talk about the “kidnappers” who stole your pragmatism; it got even worse: Morris used numerous terms from your semiotic without your name in his *Foundations of a Theory of Signs* in 1938, and twisted the triadic ideas into dyadic positivism. He defines a sign as having “three (or four)” factors, adding interpreter to his dyadic reductions of your first three triadic sign terms:

“This process, in a tradition which goes back to the Greeks, has commonly been regarded as involving three (or four) factors: that which acts as a sign, that which the sign refers to, and that effect on some interpreter in virtue of which the thing in question is a sign to that interpreter. These three components in semiosis may be called respectively, the sign vehicle, the designatum, and the interpretant; the interpreter may be included as a fourth factor. These terms make explicit the factors left undesignated in the common statement that a sign refers to something for someone” (Morris, 1938: 3). Notice how he takes your abbreviated definition of a sign as something which stands to someone in some respect or capacity, says it is a “common statement”, conveniently bypassing your name, and then introduces different terminology from your threefold sign, object, interpretant, without mentioning the switch.

Morris did not understand that “the man himself”, as you put it, is a sign, not merely, as he saw it, an interpreter considered as a “user” of signs not itself a sign. Here is a defense of your theory against Morris’s misuse by one of your old students from John Hopkins University, John Dewey, who you severely criticized in your letter of June 9, 1904 for treating logic as a developmental or genetic history rather than as a normative science. Forty years later Dewey had come to a better understanding of and appreciation for your work:

“The misrepresentation in question consists in converting Interpretant, as used by Peirce, into a personal user or interpreter. To Peirce, ‘interpreter,’ if he used the word, would mean, that which interprets, thereby giving meaning to a linguistic sign. I do not believe that it is possible to exaggerate the scorn with which Peirce would treat the notion that what interprets a given linguistic sign can be left to the whim or caprice of those who happen to use it. But it does not follow from this fact that Peirce holds that the interpretant, that which interprets a linguistic sign, is an ‘object’ in the sense of an existential ‘thing’” (Dewey, 1946: 87).

Dewey knew firsthand what your scorn might be, though, yes, you also praised him in that same letter to him. He had already become the best known living American philosopher by the time he wrote those words in 1946, yet the positivism Morris helped spearhead into American academic life had already begun its ascension, despite what you and the other pragmatists had shown to be the untenability of foundationalism in science. Foundationalism and its false promise of scientific certainty captured the minds of those unable to appreciate the subtlety of your argument that all thoughts are signs, all signs are inferences, all knowledge consists of fallible sign inferences conditionally appealing to further interpretation. Positivist “verification” ruled the day, despite the fact that you showed that there is no objective meaning in an act of positivist “verification” or even in a scientific experiment per se, only, perhaps, some isolate scientist indicating an individual thing.

Pragmatic meaning is found, as you put it, “not in an experiment, but in experimental phenomena...”, not in “any particular event that did happen to somebody in the dead past, but what surely will happen to everybody in the living future who shall fulfill certain conditions” (Peirce, 1938: 5.425). Hence there is no meaning in a present moment or immediate experimental result, but only in the living, mediate continuum of inferential, general semi-
osis. Galileo’s overturning of Aristotle’s physics was a great triumph of modern science, but Occam’s razor, as your critique of nominalism demonstrated, also cut off generality as a reality of the universe, despite the fact that science only traffics in signs and finds its objectivity in a conditional future community of interpretation, not in individual “things”.

In a few decades after your death, when the so called 20th century “Anglo American” philosophy had starved enough philosophers in America, the best alternative seemed to be “Continental” philosophy, with its phenomenology, hermeneutics, etc. This was a continental divide, a gulf of objectivism and subjectivism. But Charles, as you must know, you had already undercut that divide before it even occurred, in a philosophy more rigorous than positivism, more comprehending of signification than the Continental tradition. I mean, you developed your phenomenology independently of Husserl (even mentioning it in your 1904 letter to Dewey), calling it phaneroscopy so as not to confuse it with Hegel’s Phenomenology, and allowing the phaneron per se as its object. It is more radical than Husserl’s phenomenology in “bracketing off” Husserl’s transcendental subject in order to consider the phaneron itself. You also elaborated a comprehensive semiotic well before Saussure. You developed a rigorous philosophy of science that demonstrated why truth could not be found in a dyadic positivist reference, but only through a thoroughly social conception of an unlimited community of inquirers. Truth is a public matter, not a private positive “verification”.

I don’t mean to sweet-talk you, but in my opinion, your demarcation of a “psycho-physical universe”, of “a universe perfused with signs”; of the idea of a semiotic realism in which the life of science resides, has yet to be comprehended as the great achievement it is. It seems to me as significant as Einstein’s theory of relativity, which appeared in the last years of your life but which you unfortunately were not aware of. But the world cannot yet accept the reality of signs as an irreducible mode of being, because still trapped in the modern error of nominalism.

Enough praise! I know that you love criticism, and I have some for you. I also know that I am likely to get my ass kicked in a debate with you, master philosopher of science as you are. But that is how learning happens, isn’t it?

One thing that bothers me about your view of science is your unwillingness to allow that the very nominalism you see in its development thus far, which you criticize while celebrating the achievements of modern science, might be so potentially destructive as to open a final Pandora’s Box from which humankind, and the science so dear to you, might never recover. I wonder why you never corresponded with Henry Adams, whose sense of the dangerous increases of power without corresponding human controls was as prescient as his methods were flawed. I think you could have really helped his thinking on historical method, even as he could have sensitized you to how science, allied to power technology, could undo itself if left without some sense of human limit. Around the time of your letter to Dewey, and of Einstein’s publishing of his theory of relativity, Adams wrote to Henry Osborne Taylor on Jan. 17, 1905: “The assumption of unity which was the mark of human thoughts in the middle-ages has yielded very slowly to the proofs of complexity. The stupor of science before radium is a proof of it. Yet it is quite sure, according to my score of ratios and curves, that, at the accelerated rate of progression shown since 1600, it will not need another century or half century to tip thought upside down. Law, in that case, would disappear as theory or a priori principle, and give place to force. Morality would become police. Explosives would reach cosmic violence. Disintegration would overcome integration” (1947: 558-59).

Science and technology grew to the powers imagined by Adams, even as politics by mid-century had realized total police states. In less than a half century, in 1945, atomic ex-
plosives reached cosmic violence, and police states had broken out in the name of morality. Henry Adams foresaw in 1905 what you did not, which is curious to me given how far-sighted you were in so many different areas of inquiry.

New technical powers and systems emerged, such as computing machines, vastly elaborated beyond the electric one you attempted to build in the 1890s, which we have not yet figured out how to harness for human welfare. Our society is threatened by depersonalization, our biosphere is threatened with vast extinctions, deforestations, and climate change; toward all of which science and technology are no innocent bystanders. To this, your maxim of “do not bar the road of inquiry”, as though science should be left unfettered, bearing no responsibility to life while disemboweling it, seems to me, with all due respect, empty. I would not, of course, write in such underscored terms to any man with whom I did not feel a very deep respect and sympathy, if I may paraphrase your own words to Dewey.

Yours sincerely,
Gene Halton

Peirce letter 2: On semiotic

Dear Charles,

I wanted to get back to you on Ferdinand de Saussure’s theory of signs, which came to prominence in the twentieth century, and how it compares to your semiotic, and what implications this might have for social science today.

Saussure’s is a nominalist theory of signs in which actual conduct (speech or parole) is a mere instance, meaningless in itself; an instance of deep structure (langue) wherein meaning resides as convention, untouchable. An anthropology based on it would hold that to be human is to be avatars of convention, whose live beings mean nothing more than the conventions they represent. Saussure’s semiology is the antithesis of the Socratic model of philosophy as living speech, or of your view of semiosis as living conduct. It is a marked contrast with your view of semiosis as processual; in which “structures” are habits, perhaps you would say congealed habits. Further, Saussure does not allow, as you do, that habits of conduct, or semiosis, are potentially modifiable through criticism and self-control.

A lot of contemporary thought remains under the shadow Saussure’s semiology casts, from figures such as Derrida, through Eco, and a number of others labeled postmodernist. Lacan seems a Freudian Saussurean. A philosopher who did much to derail pragmatism, by the name of Richard Rorty, was under the Saussurean shadow, not a pragmatist, in seeing meaning nominalistically as either convention or contingency. Derrida, it seems to me, sought to escape structuralist totality by swinging the Saussurean pendulum from totalistic convention to “fissioning” of signs.

Consider the irony of these theories of meaning: Saussure’s structuralist semiology cannot account for emergence of new meaning, leaving it to poststructuralists to try to account for it as “contingency”. It is a structuralism that cannot account for the emergence of structure!

What can one say anthropologically to those thinkers today who blankly believe that human communication and representation exemplify a mode of being discontinuous with earlier forms of communication and organization. Such a belief requires blindness to the place of gestural signification in human language, which clearly is continuous with earlier, prehuman and even preprimate communication. George Herbert Mead’s philosophy of sig-
nification provides such a continuous view from “the conversation of gestures” to what Mead terms “the significant symbol”. But believing in the false abstraction of structuralism requires a false belief of discontinuity.

Many sociologists today still buy into the outlook of Durkheim and his use of the sacred in social life to account for symbolization: Durkheim is another structuralist limited to a conceptualist view of representation, holding what I elsewhere term a “bubble boy” theory of meaning, unable to touch the world. When one goes to the beliefs held by hunter-gatherer peoples, such as the Australian aboriginals Durkheim discussed, one sees that, contra Durkheim, they hold mind to be continuous with the living landscape, not some discontinuous product of a structuralist mind cage. So does your semiotic, which allows the object of a sign to be part of the sign, including the actual objects of habitat. Your semiotic allows that human mind emerges in transaction with the living intelligence of habitat, that indeed, it is an adaptation to that habitat and of mind in general. Your critical common-sensism allows that evolved, tempered habits of mind percolate from deep within the human body-mind, providing us with, if I may express it tersely, indubitable yet fallible ideas for the practice of life.

The Scottish common-sensists’ idea of “original and natural judgments of common sense” also raises the question of inborn ideas. What if there are such, so deeply engrained as to be indubitable? The typical response today is to say that ideas are social, and that a naturally given idea could not be social, so that inborn ideas are not possible. But this seems to me to falsely assume that human biology is not itself social. The physiological capacity for speech stems from genetically encoded, developmentally released biological capacities that are themselves the result of prior social experience and selection, yet requiring social interaction for their release and cultivation.

Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu’s popular theory of “habitus” cannot handle the possibility of biologically engrained habits, because his conception of habit is too conceptual. Between the habits of conduct and the situation is the living and spontaneous “I”. Habit is not limited to dead convention, as it is in Bourdieu, and habit change can be more than contingency, which is where a number of postmodernists unnecessarily limit themselves. It makes me wonder why Bourdieu’s overly conceptualized conception of habit has become so fashionable in the social sciences, given the vast role, more richly conceived, that habit has played in Anglo-American philosophy in the past few hundred years? Pragmatism alone makes it central, and more deeply thought out than Bourdieu’s conception, allowing the possibilities of living habit and self-correcting habits of conduct. But Bourdieu applies his idea fruitfully to interesting studies of status as social capital, so perhaps a more generous route might be to consider what a pragmatic conceptualization of habit could add to typical phenomena that Bourdieu considers. Actually Thorstein Veblen, who you might remember from your time at Johns Hopkins University, did something like that decades before Bourdieu.

Still, Bourdieu cannot, in the end, deal with something like aesthetic taste as anything more than habitualized social conventions. He works that vein to great effect, and it’s a rich vein, but to see taste as only rote conventions is to my mind ultimately, well, tasteless. What about taste in the literal sense of con gusto, as sensual experience? What about the whole realm of qualitative experience and signification you and Dewey showed to be an irreducible modality of signification?

You, with some humor, designated humankind as a “degenerate monkey”, acknowledging the evolutionary significance of human neoteny. I think that idea can be put to good use in considering the long evolutionary path to anatomically modern humans and the signific-
ance of that evolution for society today. But it needs to be joined to other conceptions not considered by you.

The “original exchange” is not mere human concepts of “sacred” anthropocentric “structure”, but what Paul Shepard termed “the sacred game”, the interplay of predator and prey, and the literal and spiritual incorporation of the wild Other (a game is a process, a sign process in the sense of your semiotic). The sacred game is where the human mind emerged, a game so subtle it required all the abilities it summoned forth from its human players, even as it fed them with those emerging abilities and helped them to evolve and incarnate them, including.....perhaps you would agree?....language.

With regards,
Gene Halton

To Charles Peirce, final letter

Dear Charles,

Part of your outlook is that rationality is the most evolutionarily immature of our brain capacities, requiring connection in life to other, more mature capacities such as sentiment and instinct from the older passionate brain centers, in order to operate optimally. Hence, as I understand you, rational science, which you champion, is inadequate as a guide to practical life, because it does not draw deeply enough from the bodily resources available to practical reason. This I get. Indeed, so much of the morass of modernity is due precisely to the outlook which takes rational reason as defining what reason is, and the unlimited expansion of rational reason as progress and enlightenment, rather than a form of infantilization. Unhinged expansion of rationality results in rational madness. Yet rationality limited, conceived as a not fully matured capacity requiring its synaptic tethering to the larger community of passions both constituting brain and incarnating the broader community of organic reasonableness, results in optimized rational capacity for the practice of life. Rationality optimized is not maximized rationality.

But then consider the possibility that “the degenerate monkey” that you characterized humanity as being is even further infantilized in its form as scientist. You saw, rightly as I understand you, why science is too thin to be practical, why it must be limited as a theoretical pursuit. But you did not see how scientists, qua scientists, may for the same reason be subhumans, limited in their precision to what the nominalized goals of our age sets for them. As such they become dangerous when they rise to prominent positions to advocate science policies for practical life, speaking from their scientific (and by you limited) perspective, and from a nominalistic conception of science at that. They begin making nuclear bombs and altering the very genetic basis of life itself, often in the service of governments or corporations who care only about power and profit. Not that the other extreme, politicians ignorant of science, are any better. This is the issue Dewey was wrestling with, in trying to find a way for a conception of inquiry as a basis for democratic life. His answer was unsatisfying to me, because he did not allow that scientific inquiry per se may be too narrow a model. But at least he was concerned with the problem, which you seem to have glossed over.

Dewey was trying to argue against authoritarian models of society. But his quest for a democratic good life rooted in the idea of scientific inquiry amounted to an unwitting blueprint for technocracy, rule by elite technocratic authorities, where your view allows that life is broader than science, and that science should be restricted in its place in society. Your
critical common-sensism seems to me a way that allows intelligent inquiry a place in prac-
tical life, but bases it in the more mature passions of reasonableness, acknowledging that
those passions evolved and adapted over a longer stretch of time, and hence embody ma-
tured capacities of impassioned reasonableness. Still, your indifference to the dangers of
actually existing science, even in your day but particularly now, remains problematic. You
assumed the scientific method would eventually work out false assumptions of nominalism,
but in my view, neglected how those assumptions could be suicidally toxic, to the point of
aborting a human “long run”.

Stricter safeguards on new technologies seem to me a moral necessity where relevant,
and today, scientific inquiry cannot be strictly separated from its conjoined schizoid twin,
technology. Together they are destroying the earth, the social fabric, and us. That’s the gap
I don’t see you addressing.

In Aldous Huxley’s 1932 novel Brave new World, a controller of a technologically ad-
vanced society hundreds of years in the future, based on the principles of mass production
Henry Ford was developing in your last years of life, expresses exactly the expedient per-
version of inquiry to serve practical concerns that you were fearful of:

“I’m interested in truth, I like science. But truth’s a menace, science is a public danger.
As dangerous as it’s been beneficent. It has given us the stabllest equilibrium in history.
China’s was hopelessly insecure by comparison; even the primitive matriarchies weren’t
steadier than we are. Thanks, I repeat, to science. But we can’t allow science to undo its
own good work. That’s why we so carefully limit the scope of its researches—that’s why I
almost got sent to an island. We don’t allow it to deal with any but the most immediate
problems of the moment. All other enquiries are most sedulously discouraged. It’s curious”,
he went on after a little pause, “to read what people in the time of Our Ford used to write
about scientific progress. They seemed to have imagined that it could be allowed to go on
indefinitely, regardless of everything else. Knowledge was the highest good, truth the su-
preme value; all the rest was secondary and subordinate. True, ideas were beginning to
change even then. Our Ford himself did a great deal to shift the emphasis from truth and
beauty to comfort and happiness. Mass production demanded the shift. Universal happiness
keeps the wheels steadily turning; truth and beauty can’t. And, of course, whenever the
masses seized political power, then it was happiness rather than truth and beauty that mat-
tered. Still, in spite of everything, unrestricted scientific research was still permitted. People
still went on talking about truth and beauty as though they were the sovereign goods. Right
up to the time of the Nine Years’ War. That made them change their tune all right. What’s
the point of truth or beauty or knowledge when the anthrax bombs are popping all around
you? That was when science first began to be controlled—after the Nine Years’ War. People
were ready to have even their appetites controlled then. Anything for a quiet life. We’ve
gone on controlling ever since. It hasn’t been very good for truth, of course. But it’s been
very good for happiness. One can’t have something for nothing. Happiness has got to be
paid for. You’re paying for it, Mr. Watson—paying because you happen to be too much in-
terested in beauty. I was too much interested in truth; I paid too”.

Comfort and happiness: who would want to fight that? Yet these words give lie to the
cost they bring when elevated to ultimate goals of life. Life in earnest, life for real, cannot
be reduced to comfort as a basis for happiness. Ultimate happiness, even in practical life,
must be more than comfort. It must involve creative participation in the greater community
of life, engaging it, living to sustain it. And science, though narrower, lives to sustain the
bringing into being of truth, regardless of happiness. As you showed so well, science, as a human practice, serves general truths greater than human comfort, and should be regarded as the valuable yet impractical practice it is: it should be kept in its place, limited. When turned to considerations of comfort, science becomes a loose cannon, subject to passing fashions and bureaucratic control. That is the grave problem we now face.

New technologies and devices and even life-forms now bubble forth from labs in ever greater profusion. The question is whether such safeguards are “blocking the road of inquiry” or what I will call “building the road of inquiry”. It just seems to me infantile to open Pandora’s box scientifically, but to treat the consequences of that scientific opening of the door as not themselves part of the pragmatic meaning of “scientifically opening the door”.

Unfettered exploration, under the eye of public scrutiny, is perhaps like Gandhi’s response to the question, “Mr. Gandhi, What do you think of Western civilization?” He said “I think it would be a very good idea”. Consider how the foundations of Big Science today are rooted in the legacy of the Manhattan Project, which gathered the greatest minds for an amazing project which had all the essential characteristics of science except public scrutiny. Consider massive funding by the Pentagon for projects such as the internet, or massive funding of research by private corporations who maintain privacy for commercial purposes, even patenting the genetic blueprints of life for private gain. Public scrutiny is too easily shunted aside, and today, I fear, we may be cooking the “primordial soup” of the Apocalypse in commercial ventures involving genetic recombination, including the unintended ones wafting from toxic manure lagoons of the unfettered agricultural complex. The recent pandemic of 2009 originated in La Gloria, Mexico, where a giant high-tech Smithfield pig slaughtering plant operates unfettered, with huge toxic manure lagoons blending pig, human, and, from a nearby industrial poultry operation, avian DNA: Recombinant Roulette!

No thought is given to how to close Pandora’s Box before opening and patenting it, or such thoughts are repressed from public hearing by money and power interests. J. Robert Oppenheimer, director of the Manhattan Project, which developed the first atomic bombs used as weapons against Japan, said: “In some sort of crude sense which no vulgarity, no humor, no overstatement can quite extinguish, the physicists have known sin; and this is a knowledge which they cannot lose”. Oppenheimer was later betrayed by fellow physicist Edward Teller, who lied that Oppenheimer was a security risk, and Oppenheimer was blackballed. Science-fused-to-tech has become Krishna, avatar of Vishnu, manifesting unfettered to Arjuna, multi-armed and saying, as Oppenheimer put it: “Now I am become death, the destroyer of worlds.” So where do you stand in today’s world, Charles, where nominalism is perfecting itself through the avatars of its scientific-industrial complex, not, as it has claimed, in a non-teleological manner, but instead allied to an ultimate goal of dehumanization? Modern nominalistic science you see, or at least as I am claiming, is avatar of a mythic projection of the machine, of a clockworks symbolism of automatism, onto the cosmos. And it seems bent on strangling itself before correcting itself.

OK, I came across a variant of your “do not bar the road of inquiry” maxim I can live with, from your letter of 1905 to Dewey: “Never permanently bar the road of any true inquiry” (CP 8.243). By introducing “permanently”, it seems to me to allow for questioning of potential harmful effects of some inquiries, and the barring of them when needed until adequate safeguards can be established.

Charles, you are the vox clamantis in deserto of modern thought. Your devotion to science and logic led you to develop a philosophy with more rigor than any other accounts of modern science, in my opinion. It also led you to reject the nominalistic foundations of
modern thought, including modern scientific thought, and to replace them with a broadened understanding of reason.

Your 1893 essay “Evolutionary Love” was anthologized and read, but for many it served to illustrate your ideas as out of touch with accepted evolutionary principles of natural selection. Of course your point was precisely to criticize natural selection as a precise but partial aspect of evolution, which, when taken as the totality of evolution, amounted to a false “philosophy of greed”. Instead you saw it as corresponding to your category of firstness, as a doctrine of chance or what you termed tychism. You added two other modalities, corresponding to your three modes of being: evolution by secondness or mechanical necessity, which you termed anancasm, and evolution by thirdness or habit taking or evolutionary love, which you termed agapasm. The typical response to these two other categories was that they do not fit the natural selection model.

But then the second modality of necessity you described, using Clarence King’s idea of catastrophic events causing sudden shifts in populations, seems to receive support by the idea of “punctuated equilibria”, though no credit was given to you. Similarly, your use of Lamarckian-like inheritance through habit seems now justified by the discovery of the epigenome, which encodes an organism’s experience onto the heritable DNA. But biologists still refuse to consider natural selection per se as incomplete, as one modality involved with others.

As one degenerate monkey to another, I just want to let you know I find your ideas on evolution, on semiotic realism as allowing mind in nature and brain as in mind rather than the reverse, to hold many suggestive possibilities for further lines of inquiry, especially, for me, on the larger perspective of human development. Your devotion to your work despite the punishing indifference of the world seems to me well worth your effort, and I simply want to thank you for all that you have given me.

Cheers,
Gene

References


Section II. Empowering the Margins of Society
Susan Haack

Pragmatism, Law, and Morality: The Lessons of Buck v. Bell

Abstract. Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. – a founding member of the Metaphysical Club, and traditionally regarded as the first legal pragmatist – would eventually become a Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court. In one of his best-known rulings for the Court, Buck v. Bell (1927), Holmes held that Carrie Buck’s constitutional rights would not be violated by allowing the State of Virginia to sterilize her against her will. This disturbing ruling has sometimes been thought to confirm criticisms of Holmes’s (alleged) moral skepticism. But this, I argue, is a mistake: Holmes was no moral skeptic but, like James and Dewey, a moral fallibilist; and his ruling in Buck, misguided as it is, is nevertheless illustrative of his important theoretical point that judges are no less fallible about moral questions than the rest of us, and that it’s dangerous for them to imagine otherwise.

To say that man is made up of strength and weakness, of insight and blindness, of pettiness and grandeur, is not to draw up an indictment against him: it is to define him.

Denis Diderot

Not long ago, I was startled to read in my morning paper that legislators in North Carolina were nearing consensus on how to compensate roughly 3,000 people who had been involuntarily sterilized under the state’s eugenics laws – the first of which was enacted in 1919, and the most recent of which wasn’t repealed until 2003. Until then, I had no idea such laws had survived so long; now I know that the Mississippi sterilization statute wasn’t repealed until 2008 – and that a 1909 Washington sterilization statute remains on the books to this day.

1 © 2011 Susan Haack. All rights reserved.
4 Chapter 281, Public Laws of North Carolina, Session 1919. This law “was undoubtedly intended to provide for sterilization operations though the word ... did not occur”. A subsequent statute enacted in 1929 was declared unconstitutional by the state Supreme Court in 1933, and was replaced by a new law the same year. See Elsie L. Porter, Biennial Report of the Eugenics Board of North Carolina, July 1, 1946 to June 30, 1948 (http://www.archive.org/details/biennialreporteug07nort).
5 There is a table of when states enacted and repealed such laws in Paul A. Lombardo, Three Generations, No Imbeciles: Eugenics: The Supreme Court, and Buck v. Bell (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), p. 294.
6 §§ 41-45-1 to 41-45-19 of the Mississippi code were repealed by Laws 2008, ch.412, §50, eff. July 1, 2008. (At this time Lombardo’s book (note 5 above) would have been in press, so he lists this Mississippi law as still “intact”).
7 1909 c. 249 § 35; RRS §2287 (1909) remains in force. (In 1921, however, Washington introduced a new sterilization statute, L. ‘21, § 6957-6969, which was overturned in 1942).
Inevitably, my thoughts turned to Justice Holmes’s now-notorious ruling for the U.S. Supreme Court in the 1927 case of *Buck v. Bell*, holding that an order from the superintendent of the Virginia State Colony for Epileptics and the Feeble Minded that inmate Carrie Buck be sterilized didn’t violate her constitutional rights; and I began to wonder whether, and if so how, exactly, this ruling should bear on our assessment of Oliver Wendell Holmes’s theoretical ideas about the law, and especially of his ideas about the relation of law and morality.

Traditionally regarded as the first legal pragmatist, Holmes has variously been accused of inconsistency on the subject of law and morality, of moral skepticism, and even of “brutalitarianism” – which some might think his ruling in *Buck v. Bell* confirms. But this, I will argue, is a mistake: Holmes, like James and Dewey, held a kind of moral fallibilism – which is far removed from moral skepticism, and conduces neither to inconsistency nor to brutalitarianism; and his ruling in *Buck v. Bell*, morally misguided as it is, is nevertheless illustrative of Holmes’s larger theoretical point, that judges are no less fallible about moral questions than the rest of us, and it’s dangerous for them to imagine otherwise.

I begin, in §1, by tracing pragmatist themes in Holmes’s legal thinking; and then, in §2, look more closely at what he has to say specifically about the relation of law and morality. The next step, in §3, will be to explore the ruling in *Buck v. Bell*, the history of the case, its context, and its consequences; and finally, in §4, I conclude by spelling out some philosophical lessons to be learned from this disturbing, but fascinating, story.

I. Holmes and his Place in Pragmatism

“Mr. Justice Holmes,” Peirce wrote around 1906, “will not, I believe, take it ill that we are proud to remember his membership” in the Metaphysical Club. In fact, we know that Holmes was involved even before the first meeting of the club, when James wrote to him in 1868 from Berlin: “When I get home let’s establish a philosophical society to have regular meetings and discuss none but the very tallest and broadest questions – to be composed of none but the very topmost of Boston manhood.”

The son of a well-known physician and poet, Holmes was certainly among the very topmost of young Boston manhood; and by 1868 he had already taken the first steps on the path that would eventually lead him first to the Massachusetts and then to the U.S. Su-
Pragmatism, Law, and Morality: The Lessons of Buck v. Bell

Susan Haack

preme Court: after graduating from Harvard College in 1861 and serving in the Union army for three years during the Civil War, in 1866 he completed his course at Harvard Law School. But “before turning his mind to the more serious business of the law”, Holmes had “sowed his wild metaphysical oats”, reading especially the empiricists and the positivists, and had attended some of Peirce’s 1866 lectures on “The Logic of Science”.

Still, as the saying goes, the law is a jealous mistress; and after the winter of 1871-2 Homes rarely attended meetings of the Metaphysical Club. Nor did he ever officially ally himself with pragmatism – not surprisingly, since both his celebrated book, The Common Law (1881), and his celebrated lecture, “The Path of the Law” (1897) were published before the public debut of the word “pragmatism,” in its new, philosophical sense (in James’s 1898 lecture, “Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results”). Indeed, the evidence seems to be that Holmes didn’t clearly distinguish James’s pragmatism from his doctrine of the Will to Believe – which, moreover, he dismissed as an “amusing humbug”. And when, many years later, Holmes read Morris Cohen’s early anthology of Peirce’s work, what seems to have struck him most forcibly was what he took to be Peirce’s curious weakness for wishful thinking “in the direction of religion &c., ... despite his devotion to logic”.

Nevertheless, both legal scholars and historians of philosophy acknowledge Holmes as the first legal pragmatist; and with good reason, for many themes familiar from the philo-

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16 Holmes served on the U.S. Supreme Court from 1902 to 1931. Id., p. 15.
17 During the Civil War Holmes “was wounded three times, twice near fatally, and suffered from dysentery”. Id., p. 9.
18 Interestingly, this involved his attending Harvard Law School for only a little over a year. Ibid.
19 Id., 1, pp. 229-30.
23 William James, “Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results,” University Chronicle (University of California, Berkeley), September 1898; reprinted in James, Pragmatism (1907), eds. Frederick Burkhardt and Fredson Bowers (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), 257-70. Peirce had articulated the Pragmatic Maxim twenty years before, in “How to Make Our Ideas Clear” (CP 5.388-410 (1878)), but hadn’t used the word “pragmatism,” for fear of being misunderstood.
24 Holmes, letter to Frederick Pollock, June 17th, 1908), in Mark DeWolfe Howe, ed., Holmes-Pollock Letters: The Correspondence of Mr Justice Holmes and Sir Frederick Pollock, 1874-1932, MA: Harvard University Press, (1941), 1: 139.
26 “The Holmes-Cohen Correspondence,” ed. F. M. Cohen, Journal of the History of Ideas, 9, 1948: 3-57, p. 34. Of course, Holmes’ reaction was more than a little ironic: for Peirce himself evidently found James’s Will to Believe doctrine quite troubling; and indeed, the year after The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy was published (1897), can be found urging, instead, the “Will to Learn,” a genuine desire to discover the truth, Peirce, CP 5.583 (1898).
27 Richard Posner lists among those who “philosophized” pragmatism “Emerson, and later Peirce, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., William James, John Dewey, George Herbert Mead, and others.” Law, Pragmatism, and Democracy (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 12. Max Fisch describes The Common Law as “full of the spirit of pragmatism from the ringing sentences in which its theme is announced—the life of the law has not been logic; it has been experience”—to the end”. Max H. Fisch, “Justice Holmes, The Prediction Theory of the Law, and Pragmatism” (1942), in Kenneth Lane Kehner and Christian Klosek, eds., Peirce, Socratic and Pragmatism (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986), 6-18, p. 8. (Fisch even suggests (id., p.8) that Peirce’s pragmatic maxim may have been a generalization of Holmes’s idea of law-as-prediction, rather than the
sophers of the classical pragmatist tradition can also be found in Holmes’s legal thinking. Here, I can only sketch some of the most important:

(i) Law as prediction. Very early on, in 1872, Holmes had written that:

... in a civilized state it is not the will of the sovereign that makes lawyers’ law, even when that is its source, but what ... the judges, by whom it is enforced, say is his will ...

In 1897, in the first lines of “The Path of the Law,” he returns to this theme. The object of legal study, he writes, “is prediction, the prediction of the incidence of the public force through the instrumentality of the courts”; and in the next paragraph he adds:

... a legal duty so called is nothing but a prediction that if a man does or omits certain things he will be made to suffer in this or that way by judgment of the court; – and so of a legal right.

Holmes’s main point here is that what an attorney advising his client needs to know isn’t the “will of the sovereign”, or the provisions as written in the statute books; it is, rather, how those statutes will be interpreted and enforced by the courts. But there is also, as Fisch points out, a clear affinity with Peirce’s statement of the pragmatic maxim:

Consider what effects, that might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then, our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object.

And there is, in anything, an even closer affinity with James’s version:

The effective meaning of any proposition can always be brought down to some particular consequence in our future practical experience. ... There can be no difference that doesn’t make a difference – no difference in abstract truth that doesn’t make a difference in concrete fact.

other way around.) Wiener’s Evolution and the Founders of Pragmatism (note 20 above) includes a chapter on “Evolutionary Pragmatism in Holmes’s Theory of the Law”.

These and other pragmatist themes are also woven into the “neo-classical legal pragmatism” I developed in “The Pluralistic Universe of Law: Towards a Neo-Classical Legal Pragmatism”, Ratio Juris, 21.4, 2008: 453-80.

Holmes, Note, American Law Review 6, 1871: 723-5. Reprinted in Novick (note 14 above), vol. 1, 294-7; the quotation is from p. 295.


This qualification is important, since the idea that a judge is predicting what he will decide seems implausible to say the least.


Peirce, CP 5.401 (1878). I am also reminded of Peirce’s later reflections on laws of nature: “Law, without force to carry it out, would be a court without a sheriff; and all its dicta would be vaporings.” Id., 1.212 (1902). Peirce makes the same point again in a letter to Lady Welby, dated 1904 (8.330); and at 7.523 (n.d.).

James, “Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results” (note 23 above), pp. 259, 260.
In short, Holmes shares the (other) pragmatists’ concern to get away from mere verbalism, and to clarify meanings by reference to consequences.

(ii) The growth and adaptation of legal concepts. In the opening paragraph of The Common Law, immediately after that memorable line, “the life of the law has not been logic; it has been experience,” Holmes writes that judges’ interpretation of the law has more to do with “the felt necessities of the time, the relevant moral and political theories, [and] even the prejudices which judges share with their fellow-men” than with the pristinely logical implications of statutory provisions. Later in the book he suggests why, when he describes how legal concepts shift and change over time: e.g., how older understandings that held animals and even inanimate objects legally responsible for causing injury or death gradually gave way to more modern understandings requiring intent or culpable negligence on the part of a human agent.

Holmes sees such conceptual elasticity as both inevitable and desirable, enabling the law to adapt to new knowledge, to technological developments, and to changing social mores and values. But this elasticity in legal concepts also means that a legal system can’t plausibly be conceived axiomatically, as a system of basic legal-conceptual truths from which correct decisions can simply be deduced – the model proposed by Christopher Columbus Langdell, first Dean of Harvard Law School (whom Holmes once paid the marvelously back-handed compliment, “greatest living legal theologian!”)

Holmes’s ideas about the evolution of legal concepts are strikingly reminiscent of Peirce’s on the growth of meaning generally – the earliest expression of which comes from the 1866 lectures:

Science is continually gaining new conceptions. ... How much more the word electricity means now than it meant in the days of Franklin, ... how much more the term planet means now than it did in the time [of] Hipparchus. These words have acquired information .... In fact, ... men and words reciprocally educate each other ...

Returning to this theme two decades later, Peirce uses examples not from the sciences, but from the concepts of social life:

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38 Id., pp. 118.


41 Peirce, CP 7.587 (1866).
Symbols grow. ... [A] symbol, once in being, spreads among the peoples. In use and in experience, its meaning grows. ... Such words as force, law, wealth, marriage, bear for us a very different meaning than they bore to our barbarous ancestors.

So Holmes shares not only Peirce’s idea that meaning grows, but also Peirce’s appreciation of the fact that the enrichment of our vocabulary, far from being an impediment to rationality, can actually enhance the cognitive flexibility and adaptability to changing circumstances that true rationality demands.

(iii) The evolution of legal systems. In his dissenting opinion in *Southern Pacific v. Jensen* (1917), Holmes writes that:

The common law is not some brooding omnipresence in the sky, but the articulate voice of some sovereign or quasi-sovereign that can be identified, the law of some state.

He had long been impatient with the idea of Law-as-such, thinking rather (in the small) in terms of the specific legal system of a place and a time and (in the large) of the whole congeries of legal systems, past, present, and future. And he had long stressed that every legal system is an artifact of history; all have evolved, grown, adapted – and many have died away – in response to changing circumstances. The common law, he writes in “The Path of the Law”, has evolved “like a plant”, growing, spreading, sporting, adapting to new niches:

The development of [the common] law has gone on for nearly a thousand years, ... each generation taking the inevitable next step, mind, like matter, simply obeying a law of spontaneous growth.

So we find in Holmes’s legal thinking the same evolutionary tendencies that, in various ways, also inform his fellow-pragmatists’ thinking about inquiry, language, and even, in Peirce, about the cosmos as a whole. In fact, for a scholar of pragmatism the thought that Holmes expresses here, and even the language he uses, will bring Peirce’s agapism – his grand cosmological vision of a universe gradually evolving from chaos to greater order by “affectability” – irresistibly to mind.

(iv) Gradualism. “Most differences”, Holmes writes in his ruling in *Rideout v. Knox* (1889), turn out, “when nicely analyzed”, to be matters of degree. Of necessity, the law

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42 Id., 2.302 (c.1895).
draws sharp lines: e.g., to define the age at which a person is no longer a juvenile but legally an adult, or the level of blood alcohol that constitutes intoxication for legal purposes; but such sharp legal lines are virtually always artificial. It hardly needs saying that this understanding of legal dichotomies as artificial dualisms imposed on what are really differences of degree parallels Dewey’s critique of untenable dualisms49, James’s hope that pragmatism could bridge the gap between the tough- and the tender-minded50 and, of course, Peirce’s complaints about those who, flouting the synecchistic principle of looking for continuities rather than hard-and-fast distinctions, “do philosophy with an axe” – only to end up with “unrelated chunks of being”51.

(v) The past and the future of the law. We can understand why our legal system is as it is today, Holmes argues, only by looking to its history and to the circumstances in which this or that law or rule arose. “The law embodies the story of a nation’s development through many centuries,” he writes in The Common Law, and fully to understand it we “must alternately consult history and existing theories of legislation”52. In “The Path of the Law” he returns to this theme, writing that the only way we can understand, for example, the doctrine in English law that any physical change to a written contract voids it is to remember that originally a contract was inseparable from the actual physical parchment on which it was written, and couldn’t survive the destruction of the parchment or its seal53. But, Holmes continues, we need a better reason for continuing to do things a certain way than that this is what we have always done – especially when the reasons for doing things that way have long since vanished. We should consider, instead:

... the ends which [legal] rules seek to accomplish, why those ends are desired, what is given up to gain them, and whether those ends are worth the price.54

In short, Holmes’s insistence that to master the law we must look to the future as well as the past conforms to the familiar pragmatist pattern of looking to consequences, the future, the potential55.

(vi) The relevance of the sciences, especially the social sciences, to the law. In the same passage of “The Path of the Law” in which he writes of the need to consider ends and means, costs and consequences, Holmes famously observes that “[f]or the rational study of the law the blackletter man may be the man of the present”, but “the man of the future is the

54 Id., p. 404.
man of statistics and the master of economics. But while Holmes speaks here specifically of statistics and economics, it’s very clear he has in mind the sciences, especially the social sciences, generally; and the illustration he gives has to do, not with economics, but with criminal psychology:

What better have we than a blind guess to show that the criminal law does more good than harm? ... Does punishment deter? ... If the typical criminal is a degenerate, bound to swindle or to murder by as deep-seated an organic necessity as that which makes the rattlesnake bite, ... he must be got rid of. ... If, on the other hand, crime, like normal human conduct, is mainly a matter of imitation, punishment may fairly be expected to keep it out of fashion.

One might wish, as I do, that Holmes hadn’t written as if all criminals fall either in the “rattlesnake” category or in the “emulating a bad role model” category – his official gradualism notwithstanding, he seems to have succumbed here to not one but two false dichotomies! But for now I will only point out the clear affinities of Holmes’s appeal to criminal psychology with the (other) pragmatist philosophers’ aspiration to see philosophy work hand in hand with the sciences, and perhaps especially with Dewey’s observations about the relevance of the social sciences, including economics, to ethics.

(vii) Moral fallibilism. This leads me to the last on my list of pragmatist themes to be found in Holmes’s writing, and the one that will be most important to the argument that follows: the moral fallibilism that informs his resistance to those “who think it advantageous to get as much ethics into the law as they can.” This is close kin, not only to the fallibilism of James’s and Dewey’s moral philosophies specifically, but to the fallibilist spirit of the pragmatist movement more generally. On this subject, however, Holmes has often been misunderstood; and so, especially in view of its importance to the present argument, it deserves its own section.

II. Law, Morality, and Public Sentiment

“If you want to know the law and nothing else, you must look at it as a bad man”: from the perspective, that is, of a person who cares only about the advantages or disadvantages to himself of doing this or that, and is entirely indifferent to what may be morally right or mo-

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58 See e.g. Peirce, CP 5.4112 (1905) (describing pragmatism as expressing “the experimentalist’s view of assertion”); 6.1-5 (1898) (urging the need for scientific metaphysics). James, Pragmatism (n.50 above), p. 31 (envisioning philosophy and the sciences as working together).
62 “Out of a contrite fallibilism,” Peirce writes, “combined with a high faith in the reality of knowledge, all my philosophy has always seemed to grow.” CP 1.14 (c.1897).
rally wrong. This is Holmes’s heuristic device for avoiding the confusions of law and morality that he believed were ubiquitous:

Take the fundamental question, What constitutes the law? You will find some text writers telling you that it is ... a system of reason, that it is a deduction from principles of ethics or admitted axioms or what not ... . But if we take the view of our friend the bad man we shall find that he does not care two straws for the axioms or deductions, but he does care what the Massachusetts or English courts are likely to do in fact. I am much of his mind.

His point is that, despite a substantial overlap of their vocabularies (“right,” “obligation,” “duty,” “responsibility,” etc.), law and morality are conceptually distinct. Moreover, Holmes continues, even where the law shares a vocabulary with ethics, the words have different meanings in the different contexts; and if we forget this we will inevitably fall into fallacies of equivocation. “[N]othing but confusion of thought,” as he puts it, “can result from assuming that the rights of man in a moral sense are equally rights in the sense of the Constitution and the law.”

Law and morality, Holmes continues, are also different in extension. Some moral rights, obligations, etc., fall outside the scope of the law; and some legal provisions fall outside the scope of morality. As Holmes puts it, “[f]or the most part [the law] falls well within the lines of any [moral] system, and in some cases may extend beyond them.” At the same time, however, he makes no bones about the fact that “[m]orally wrong statutes can be and have been enforced.”

But though he emphasizes the differences (both in intension and in extension) between law and morality, Holmes doesn’t deny the moral relevance of law. Far from it. “I take for granted that no reader of mine will mistake what I say for the language of cynicism,” he writes, and roundly declares that the law:

... is the witness and external development of our moral life. Its history is the history of the moral development of the race. The practice of it, despite popular jests, tends to make good citizens and good men.

Two points combine here: first, that a legal system reflects the moral sensibilities and moral fault lines of its place and its time, and changes as those sensibilities change; and second, that the rule of law itself brings moral benefits. With respect to the first, evidently at least part of what Holmes has in mind is that judges’ interpretations of the law are influenced by their moral attitudes, and that these moral attitudes are usually also those of the community at large – or, often, reflect significant moral disagreements within the community. With respect to the second, it seems he has in mind not only that the rule of law makes life safer and more predictable, but also that a (decent) legal system can enable and encourage moral progress.

Holmes urges that judges look to considerations of “social advantage”; meaning, as I read him, not that they should advance the interests of this or that social class, but that they

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64 Id., p. 393.
65 Ibid.
66 Ibid.
67 Ibid.
68 Id., p. 392.
69 Ibid.
70 Id., p. 398.
should consider the good of society as a whole. True, he also writes of “legal battle grounds where ... the decision can do no more than embody the preference of a given body in a given place and time”\(^{71}\); but the context makes clear this refers only to cases where “the means do not exist for determinations that shall be good for all time”\(^{72}\). And in a speech given in 1913 he warns that:

\[
\text{[i]t is a misfortune if a judge reads his conscious or unconscious sympathy with one side or the other prematurely into the law, and forgets that what seem [to him] to be first principles are believed by half his fellow-men to be wrong’.}
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This caution against moral over-confidence echoes Peirce’s warnings about “the blight of cocksureness”\(^{74}\), the danger of being too sure that you know.

In explaining the difference between legal and moral uses of the same language, Holmes seems to suggest that the law is concerned only with external acts, while morality focuses on intentions\(^{75}\). This can’t be right. The law often cares, not only about a person’s overt actions, but also about his intent: indeed, \textit{mens rea} is a key requirement of criminal responsibility\(^{76}\). (No doubt Holmes would greatly have disliked the idea of “hate crime,” where the law imposes additional penalties on those convicted of certain crimes if their actions are found to have been motivated by racial or other forms of hatred\(^{77}\); but obviously that doesn’t make his diagnosis of the conceptual difference correct.) And sometimes I get the impression that Holmes takes too easily for granted that the “moral development” reflected in the evolution of a legal system invariably moves in the direction of moral improvement. This can’t be right either. The history of law e.g., in Nazi Germany, or in South Africa under apartheid, reveals that, sadly, there absolutely is no guarantee of this\(^{78}\).

Nevertheless, where Holmes’s larger perspective on law, morality, and public sentiment is concerned, I am, as he might say, “much of his mind”\(^{79}\):

- **Law and morality are conceptually distinct.** That’s right: to say that it’s morally wrong to overburden your secretary with trivial or inappropriate tasks, or to grade your students’ papers without actually reading them, is one thing; to say that such behavior is, or should be, legally prohibited is something else entirely.

- **Law and morality differ in extension.** That’s right: many legal norms (e.g.,

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\(^{71}\) \textit{Id.}, p. 397.

\(^{72}\) Ibid.


\(^{74}\) Peirce, \textit{CP} 1.13 (c.1897).

\(^{75}\) Holmes, “The Path of the Law” (note 22 above), p 395.

\(^{76}\) “\textit{Mens rea}” is “[a]n element of criminal responsibility; a guilty mind; a guilty or wrongful purpose; a criminal intent.” \textit{Black’s Law Dictionary} (note 56 above), p. 985.

\(^{77}\) In the early 1990s a number of states (among them Wisconsin, California, Florida, Vermont, Montana, and Mississippi) had enacted such penalty-enhancement statutes. Proposed federal legislation to the same effect passed the House of Representatives in 1992, but failed in the Senate. The relevant federal statute was codified in 2009. \textit{“Hate Crime Acts,” 18 U.S.C. § 249 (Supp. III 2009). Wisconsin v. Mitchell, 508 U.S. 476 (1993), 482 n.4.}

\(^{78}\) A point discussed at greater length in “On Legal Pragmatism” (note 36 above), pp. 92-5.

\(^{79}\) For a fuller development of my own view of the relation of law and morality, see the concluding section of Susan Haack, “Nothing Fancy: Some Simple Truths about Truth in the Law” (2011); forthcoming in Spanish translation in Jorge Cerdio, ed., \textit{Truth in the Law} (Place: Madrid). [English version available from the author on request].
about which side of the road to drive on, or how big a tax break you get if you install a more efficient air-conditioner) are morally indifferent; many morally objectionable forms of behavior (e.g., being hurtful or inconsiderate to your spouse, or buying “your” term paper from a commercial outfit that supplies such things for a price)\textsuperscript{80} fall outside the scope of legal regulation; and some legal norms (such as Nazi race laws\textsuperscript{81}, “Jim Crow” laws in southern U.S. states\textsuperscript{82}, or the Pakistani law that required four male, Muslim eye-witnesses to prove a charge of rape\textsuperscript{83}) are morally deplorable.

- The evolution of a legal system is intimately connected to the moral evolution of the community. That’s right: legislators may change existing laws, or impose new ones, and judges may interpret old laws differently (e.g., to forbid the execution of underage criminals\textsuperscript{84}, or extend the right to marry to same-sex couples, etc.)\textsuperscript{85} as the moral values of the community shift and change.

- The rule of law itself contributes to the moral life of a community. That’s right. The rule of law – in various degrees, depending on the character of the legal system in question – makes life safer and provides a degree of predictability that enables more people to flourish. And a good legal system may actually enlarge the moral vision of a community.

- What is morally right or good isn’t something a that judge (or anyone else) can know a priori; and a judge’s moral convictions and intuitions (like everyone else’s) are fallible. That’s right: what moral rules and social arrangements will best enable the most people to flourish and get on with the projects that matter to them isn’t transparent; it’s something that has to be, gradually and often painfully, worked out.

In short: in my estimation, Holmes has a pretty good (though not, to be sure, a perfect) understanding of the relation of law and morality. But whether and, if so, how this assessment can be squared with his ruling in \textit{Buck v. Bell} is a question that can only be answered by looking more closely at the case and its context – the subject of the next section.

III. Buck v. Bell and its Background

The idea of eugenics is very old. In the 6\textsuperscript{th} century B.C., Theognis had complained that, while we are careful to breed the best cattle and horses, among humans “everything is

\textsuperscript{83} “Islam and Rape,” \textit{Wall Street Journal}, August 3, 2006, A6 (the law was repealed the following year).
\textsuperscript{84} \textit{Roper v. Simmons}, 543 U.S. 551 (2005).
mixed, noble and base”, leading to a “degraded, motley” race of men. More famously, in Book V of Plato’s Republic, drawing an analogy with breeding hunting dogs, Socrates proposes that in the ideal city “the best men must have sex with the best women as frequently as possible, while the opposite is true of the most inferior men and women”. But the word “eugenics” wasn’t coined until 1883, when Francis Galton introduced it to refer to “all influences that tend to however remote a degree to give the more suitable races or strains of blood a better chance of prevailing speedily over the less suitable”.

Galton was second cousin to Charles Darwin, who had observed in The Origin of Species (1859) that, while the usual mechanism of evolution was natural selection, human beings have contributed to the process artificially by selectively breeding strains of animal and plant potentially useful to them:

> We cannot suppose that all the breeds [of domesticated animals and plants] were suddenly produced ... as we now see them; indeed, in several instances we know this has not been their history. The key is man’s power of accumulative selection.

Nature provides the variations; human beings select those they find desirable, and so, by artificial selection over many generations, create new breeds of domestic animal or plant.

In The Descent of Man (1871), Darwin extends his theory to the origin of human beings. Discussing the effect of civilization on natural selection, he writes that “[among savages] the weak in body or mind are soon eliminated,” but that in civilized societies we “do our utmost to check the process of elimination,” so that the weak survive to propagate their kind; and continues, “[n]o one who has attended to the breeding of domestic animals will doubt that this must be highly injurious to the race of man.” In this context, he cites Galton.

Gregor Mendel’s work on the genetics of inheritance, published in 1865, had gone largely unnoticed for decades. But by 1900 other scientists had rediscovered Mendel’s laws; and in the early years of the twentieth century many took for granted that laws like those Mendel had found to govern the inheritance of the height of pea plants or the color of their flowers could easily be extrapolated to complex human traits like feeble-mindedness or criminal tendencies. The stage was set for the rise of the eugenics movement.

In Hereditary Genius (1870), Galton had written that “the wisest policy” is to “retard the average age of marriage among the weak, and ... hasten it among the vigorous classes”. In 1905, he proposed new statistical studies of inherited family traits.
memoirs, published in 1909, he advocated measures to prevent people seriously afflicted by “lunacy, feeble-mindedness, habitual criminality, and pauperism” from reproducing their kind. The aim of eugenics, he averred, is “to check the birth-rate of the Unfit,” and to “further[] the productivity of the Fit”, thus “bringing no more individuals into the world than can be properly cared for, and those of the best stock”. And in a fragment of a work of fiction, “The Eugenical College of Kantsaywhere,” published posthumously, Galton described a world – by his lights, a utopia – where citizens are examined for physical, mental, aesthetic and “ancestral” fitness. A grade of “Pass” in Genetic Fitness allows the candidate to marry and reproduce. A grade of “Honours” privileges him or her to make a “College marriage” with another such graduate. Those who fail, however, are forbidden to procreate; and for “the idiots, insane and the Feeble-minded,” genetically the least fit, reproduction is a crime, to be severely punished.

That was fiction; but it didn’t take long for such ideas to take firm hold in the real world. In Britain, where there was much concern about the “degeneration” of the race, Sir William Beveridge (who would play a key role in the establishment of the welfare system) thought that, while “unemployables” should be taken care of, they should also be deprived of all rights of citizenship, including the right to “fatherhood”; and Winston Churchill told a delegation from the National Association for the Care of the Feeble-Minded that such people should be segregated “so that their curse die[s] with them.”

A eugenicist thread runs through the anti-individualist, “scientific” socialism of Sidney and Beatrice Webb, and can be seen in Karl Pearson’s declaration that “the child is economically a commodity.”

And in the U.S. too, enthusiasm for eugenics was on the rise. The first U.S. eugenics law was passed in Indiana in 1907; and by 1924, the year of the Virginia law challenged in *Buck*, similar laws had been passed in Washington, California, and Connecticut (1909), Nevada, Iowa, and New Jersey (1911), New York (1912), North Dakota, Kansas, Michigan,

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96 Id., p. 323.


98 As Galton reports in “Studies in Eugenics” (note 94 above), pp. 20-21, the Francis Galton Research Fellowship in National Eugenics at the University of London had been established in 1909. But the eugenics movement was soon world-wide. Alison Bashford and Philippa Levine, eds., *The History of Eugenics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) includes papers on eugenics in Britain, Southern Asia, Australia and New Zealand, China and Hong Kong, Kenya, France, the Netherlands, Scandinavia, Southern Europe, Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union, Japan, Iran, Cuba, Puerto Rico and Mexico, Brazil, Canada, the U.S. and, of course, Germany.


100 Id., pp. 35-40.

101 Id., pp. 40-44.

102 There is even a hint of such ideas in Peirce, who once wrote that imprisonment was barbaric, and that serious criminals should be “confined in relative luxury, making them useful, and preventing reproduction.” CP 2.164 (1902) (italics mine). And James had written that “our kindness for the humble and the outcast ... wars with that stern weeding-out which until now has been the condition of every perfection in the breed”. “The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life” (note 61 above), p. 157.

103 The Indiana law allowed for the compulsory sterilization of “confirmed idiots, imbeciles, and rapists” in state institutions. By 1911, at which point 873 men had been sterilized under this law, the governor threatened to cut the budgets of state mental institutions, ending the practice. Trombley (note 99 above), p. 51.
and Wisconsin (1913), Oregon, South Dakota, and New Hampshire (1917), North Carolina and Alabama (1919), and Montana and Delaware (1923). Kansas had the dubious distinction of enacting the most severe of these laws, going so far as to make it a crime “for any managing officer of a state institution to fail to recommend the sterilization of any inmate ‘unfit to procreate’.” California – where the law applied to inmates of all state institutions and anyone convicted three times of any offence and deemed to be a “sexual or moral pervert”, and after 1919 to the insane as well as the feeble-minded – had the dubious distinction of performing the largest number of compulsory sterilizations.

Some eugenic sterilization bills, however, were defeated in state legislatures, and others were vetoed by the governor of the state concerned. And some eugenics statutes had already been challenged in the courts. In 1917, for example, a federal judge ruled that performing a vasectomy on repeat-offender Rudolph Davis under the Iowa statute “for the Unsexing of Criminals, Idiots, etc.” constituted cruel and unusual punishment, and so was unconstitutional. Shortly thereafter, Iowa repealed the law Davis had challenged. The year after that, a federal court had reversed the sentence, under a Nevada law, that convicted rapist Pearley Mickle be sterilized.

By this time, the Eugenics Record Office (ERO), founded in 1910 at the initiative of biologist Charles Davenport and run by biology teacher Harry Laughlin, had spearheaded a program of research, publication, and training of field workers in eugenics. At the first national conference on Race Betterment, held in Michigan in 1914, Laughlin presented details of the program of sterilization to eliminate the eugenically unfit that he had already spelled out in an ERO publication; along with a “Model Sterilization Law” intended “to prevent the procreation of feebleminded, epileptic, inebriate, criminalistic and other degenerate persons by authorizing and providing by due process of law for the sterilization of persons with inferior hereditary properties.”

In 1921, the Chief Judge of the Chicago Municipal Court, Henry Olson, met Laughlin at a Eugenics Congress in New York, and the next year re-edited and subsidized the reissue of

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104 Lombardo (note 99 above), p. 294.
106 Id., pp. 51-3. By January 1, 1944, California had sterilized 17,012 people. Id., p.53.
107 In 1897, for example, compulsory-sterilization bills had been defeated in Michigan and Kansas. Lombardo (note 5 above) p. 21.
108 In 1905, for example, a sterilization law passed the Pennsylvania legislature, but was vetoed by the governor. Trombley (note 99 above), pp. 50-51.
109 Laws of the 35th General Assembly of Iowa, 1913, ch. 202. This law, Trombley points out, was “particularly wide-ranging”, covering “criminals, idiots, feeble-minded, imbeciles, drunkards, drug fiends, epileptics, syphilics, moral and sexual perverts, ... prostitutes, twice convicted sex offenders and thrice-convicted felons,” and could be enforced for “eugenic, punitive, or therapeutic grounds”. Trombley (note 99 above), pp. 63-4.
111 Lombardo (note 5 above), pp. 28-9, citing Davis v. Berry, 216 Fed. 413 (S.D. Iowa, 1914), and Davis v. Berry, 242 U.S. 468 (1917). Despite the fact that the law had already been repealed, in 1917 the Supreme Court heard the state’s appeal against the federal court’s decision; the two-paragraph ruling (written by Holmes, and largely concerned with procedural defects in the state’s case), directed that the appeal be dismissed.
113 Lombardo (note 5 above), pp. 30 ff.
114 Id., pp. 47 ff. The quotation is from p. 51.
Laughlin’s book, *Eugenical Sterilization*\(^\text{115}\). The new edition included a final part, written by Olson, arguing that the Model Law was constitutionally valid. Limiting reproduction for the good of society, he argued, was no less constitutional than executing criminals, conscripting citizens into military service, or requiring compulsory vaccinations\(^\text{116}\). The legally key points, he thought, were that compulsory sterilization be presented, not as punishment for a crime, but as for the good of the “patient”; and that adequate procedural safeguards be included.

The same year, 1922, G. K. Chesterton argued in *Eugenics and Other Evils* that the “stuffy science, ... bullying bureaucracy, ... [and] terrorism by tenth-rate professors” characteristic of eugenics posed a serious threat to individual liberty\(^\text{117}\). Two years later, J. B. S. Haldane observed that “some of the most ferocious enemies of human freedom” were advocating for eugenics laws\(^\text{118}\); Walter Fernald, president of the American Association for the Study of the Feeble-Minded, criticized the simple hereditarian view of mental defect\(^\text{119}\); and even eugenicist Samuel J. Holmes acknowledged that “[t]here is a great deal of rubbish written” on the subject, and that “many of the most important problems are still very puzzling”\(^\text{120}\). But by this time the eugenics bandwagon was unstoppable.

The same year, 1924, the state of Virginia passed a law providing that “the health of the patient and welfare of the community may be promoted in certain cases by the sterilization of mental defectives,” and that a vasectomy or salpingectomy\(^\text{121}\) may be performed on “any patient [sic] afflicted with hereditary forms of insanity, imbecility, etc.”\(^\text{122}\) The Virginia law followed Laughlin’s model in being premised on the idea that compulsory sterilization would be not only for the good of society generally, but also for the good of the person sterilized – because after the operation he or she could safely be released from the Colony and support him- or herself in the outside world; and in including provisions for notice and a hearing.

Under the provisions of this law, the superintendent of the State Colony for Epileptics and the Feeble Minded had ordered that Carrie Buck – “a feeble-minded white woman who was committed to the ... Colony[,] ... the daughter of a feeble-minded woman in the same institution, and the mother of an illegitimate feeble-minded child”\(^\text{123}\) – be sterilized. When it became apparent that this would be an important test case, the ERO sent Arthur H. Estabrook to Virginia to testify for the state, and Laughlin himself supplied a deposition\(^\text{124}\). First the Circuit Court of Amherst County, Virginia, and then the Supreme Court of Appeals of

\(^{115}\) Laughlin, *Eugenical Sterilization in the United States* (Chicago, IL: Psychopathic Laboratory of the Municipal Court of Chicago, 1922). According to Stephen Jay Gould, Laughlin’s model law served as the basis for the Nazis’ *Erbgesundheitsrecht*, under which, by 1939, more than 375,000 people were sterilized. Stephen Jay Gould, “Carrie Buck’s Daughter” (in his column “This View of Life”), *Natural History*, 93.7, July 1984: 14-18, p. 14.

\(^{116}\) Lombardo (note 5 above), pp. 81-90.

\(^{117}\) I rely here on Trombley (note 99 above), p. 83 (citing Chesterton, *Eugenics and Other Evils* (1922), but giving no page number).


\(^{119}\) Id., p. 146.


\(^{121}\) The word refers to the operation of tying and cutting the Fallopian tubes.

\(^{122}\) *Buck* (note 8 above), 205-6.

\(^{123}\) Id., 205.

\(^{124}\) Gould (note 115 above), pp. 15-16.
the State of Virginia, affirmed the order\textsuperscript{125}; and in 1927 the case came to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Carrie Buck’s attorney argued that the superintendent’s order was unconstitutional under the Fourteenth Amendment; specifically, that “it violates her constitutional right of bodily integrity and is therefore repugnant to the due process of law clause of the Fourteenth Amendment”\textsuperscript{126}. By a majority of 8-1\textsuperscript{127}, however, the Court ruled that Carrie Buck’s constitutional rights had not been violated, and that Virginia could go ahead and sterilize her as planned\textsuperscript{128}. At the request of then-Chief Justice (and former President) William Howard Taft\textsuperscript{129}, Holmes wrote the ruling for the majority.

Most unusually, the ruling in \emph{Buck} is only three pages long, and includes only one citation to an earlier case – a case, moreover, not about compulsory sterilization, but about compulsory vaccinations. Most of the ruling is taken up with arguments, first, that the Virginia statute included many safeguards to ensure that “the rights of the patient are most carefully considered,” and second that, in this instance, “every step was taken in scrupulous compliance to the statute”\textsuperscript{130}. What the plaintiff really claims, Holmes continues, is not that the statute didn’t provide for proper procedure, and not that, though proper procedures were provided for, they weren’t followed in this instance, but that such a law is inherently unconstitutional – that in no circumstances could such an order be justified. But, Holmes continues, “[w]e have seen more than once that the public welfare may call upon the best citizens for their lives,” and “[i]t would be strange if it could not call upon those who already sap the strength of the state for these lesser sacrifices ...”\textsuperscript{131}. The Virginia statute falls under the same principle that allows laws requiring compulsory vaccinations, which the Court had earlier found constitutional\textsuperscript{132}. Holmes then briskly dismisses the argument that, since it applies only to inmates of the State Colony, the law violates equal protection: “the law does all that is needed when it does what it can”\textsuperscript{133}. And, in the most notorious line of this most notorious ruling, he declares: “[t]hree generations of imbeciles are enough”\textsuperscript{134}.

Perhaps you will notice – what struck me the first time I heard this, and still strikes me again every time I think about it – that while it is undeniably rhetorically powerful, in a grim kind of way, it is also maddeningly \emph{illogical}. The way to avoid a fourth generation of imbeciles, surely, would have been to sterilize not only Carrie Buck, but also her infant daughter, Vivian. And perhaps, when you read Holmes’s argument that the state sometimes calls on citizens to make much greater sacrifices than this, you will wonder, as I do, whether he was remembering the thousands of young men who died in the terrible civil war in

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\textsuperscript{125} \textit{Buck v. Bell}, 130 S.E. (Supreme Court of Appeals of Virginia, 1925).

\textsuperscript{126} Trombley (note 99 above), p. 89. The Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States, ratified in 1868, provides in part that no State shall deprive a citizen of life, liberty, or property “without due process of law,” nor deny anyone within its jurisdiction “equal protection of the laws.” Bernstein (note 110 above), p. 68.

\textsuperscript{127} It is worthy of note that Justice Brandeis (known for his defense of the right to privacy) voted with the majority; and that the sole dissenter, Justice Butler (a Roman Catholic father of seven children), left us no written opinion explaining his grounds. Lombardo (note 5 above), pp. 173 (Brandeis), 171-2 (Butler). For some reason, Lombardo is severely critical of Holmes’s part in this decision, but excuses Brandeis’s vote as understandable given the social context.

\textsuperscript{128} Buck’s request for a rehearing was denied. \textit{Id.}, pp. 177-81.

\textsuperscript{129} \textit{Id.}, pp. 165-6.

\textsuperscript{130} \textit{Buck v. Bell} (note 8 above), 207.

\textsuperscript{131} \textit{Ibid}. This argument, Lombardo points out, was also to be found in earlier eugenicist literature. Lombardo (note 5 above), p. 171.


\textsuperscript{133} \textit{Id.}, 208.

\textsuperscript{134} \textit{Id.}, 207.
which he had himself fought long before. But none of this really bears on Holmes’s and his colleagues’ legal reasoning.

Probably you will also notice, as I do, that Holmes simply takes the alleged key facts of the case, that all three generation of Buck women (Carrie, her mother, Emma, and her daughter, Vivian) were “feeble-minded,” for granted. Many years later, Stephen Jay Gould would conclude that all three were mis-diagnosed. But it’s not the Supreme Court’s job to determine questions of fact, but to decide questions of law; so this doesn’t really help either.

Apparently, though, to Holmes and the seven colleagues who voted with him, the case seemed, legally, an easy one. Only a couple of years before Buck, after all, the Supreme Court of Michigan had found an order that a feeble-minded young man be sterilized constitutional – arguing that biological science has definitely demonstrated that feeble-mindedness is hereditary; that the right to beget children may be outweighed by concerns about the common welfare; and that compulsory sterilization is analogous to compulsory vaccination. Holmes and his colleagues, like the majority of the Justices of the Michigan Supreme Court, took it to be a known scientific fact that feeble-mindedness was hereditary, and that eugenics laws were in the interests of society. Statutes that imposed sterilization as punishment for certain crimes had already been ruled unconstitutional under the prohibition on cruel and unusual punishment, and eugenics statutes that didn’t provide adequate procedural safeguards, in the form of appropriate notice and a hearing, had already been ruled unconstitutional under the requirement of due process of law; but the Virginia statute was carefully crafted to avoid these constitutional pitfalls. And at this time the standard of review employed by the Supreme Court in equal-protection cases was simply that there be a “rational basis” for the lower court’s allowing a statute that applies only to a sub-class of citizens, a requirement the Virginia statute – which applied to inmates of the Colony, who were wards of the state – also satisfied.

To have grasped the potential dangers, and found plausible constitutional grounds for invalidating the statute, would have required not only much more careful scrutiny of scientific opinion (where, as we have seen, there was already dissent from some), but also a serious exercise of epistemic, moral, and legal imagination – though not, I have to add, a super-human exercise of the imagination. (In Michigan, after all, the three Justices who dis-

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135 In this context it is worth noting that in 1875 Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr. had published an article, “Crime and Automatism” (Atlantic Monthly, 35, 1875: 466-81), including the story of the nine hundred descendants, over six generations, of a girl called Margaret, at least two hundred of whom, he reports, were known criminals, and a large number of “idiots, imbeciles, drunkards, and [persons] of otherwise degraded character.” *Id.*, p. 475.

136 Gould, “Carrie Buck’s Daughter” (note 115 above). The case of Vivian Buck seems the clearest: as a small baby, she was described as feeble-minded by a social worker who thought she didn’t look quite normal; but she attended Venable Public Elementary School in Charlottesville, VA, from 1930-32, where she seems to have been an average student, and was even listed on the honor roll in April 1931. She died in 1932 of an intestinal disorder. Carrie Buck supposedly had the IQ roughly of an nine year old; but according to Prof. Lombardo (who wrote to Gould that he had met her and seen her reading the newspaper and doing the crossword), she was neither mentally ill nor retarded. *Id.*, p. 16. Carrie was committed, Gould argues, because she was pregnant and unmarried. As for Emma Buck, all Gould says is that “we have no more reason to suspect her than her daughter of true mental deficiency” (p. 17).

137 *Smith v. Command* (note 86 above), 141 (the biological evidence is overwhelming), 142 (the right to bear children is not absolute, the analogy with compulsory vaccinations).

sented in *Smith* had recognized the disturbing weakness of the science and the alarming potential for abuse of compulsory-sterilization laws.  

Reactions to the *Buck* ruling in the press and in medical and other journals are quite revealing. The ruling gives states “the right to protect society” (the *New York Times*); it “would result to [Carrie Buck’s] advantage”, by allowing her to be released from the Colony (the *Richmond (VA) Times-Dispatch*); Holmes’s “classic” ruling is in accord “with the most progressive tendencies in our social machine” (the *Charlottesville (VA) Daily Progress*); the decision provides “the remedy for imbecility” (the *Gastonia (NC) Daily Gazette*); it “protect[s] the world against morons” (the *Davenport (IA) Democrat and Leader*); it teaches us that we don’t “dispose of enough human weeds” (the *Helena (MT) Daily Independent*); it should “convince open-minded folk that such legislation is wise” (the *Montgomery (AL) Advertiser*); it “opens future possibilities of vast importance in the field of eugenics and public health” (the *Journal of the American Medical Association*); it would “halt the imbecile’s perilous line” (the *Literary Digest*).

Some reaction was more critical: the *Daily Herald*, for example, cautioned that eugenic sterilization was “not a panacea,” and the *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* worried that such programs might go to extremes. But, though “sentimentalists were vexed,” *Time* magazine reported, “eugenicists cheered” the ruling. Eugenicists cheered, all right – one might say they gloated. Among them was Western State Asylum Superintendent Joseph DeJarnette, a long-time advocate of eugenic sterilization and an expert witness at the first *Buck* trial. The Virginia law, DeJarnette wrote in the *Virginia Medical Monthly* for January 1931, would “prevent a great deal of unhappiness, murders, crimes, drunkenness and accidents,” and make the state “safer, saner, and better to live in”; and wraps up his argument with some dreadful doggerel on the subject of “Mendel’s Law”:

Oh, why are you men so foolish –  
You breeders who breed our men  
Let the fools, the weaklings and crazy  
Keep breeding and breeding again?  
The criminal, deformed, and the misfit,  
Dependent, diseased, and the rest –  
As we breed the human family  
The worst is as good as the best

... and so on and on, for four more verses.

Not surprisingly, after the Supreme Court’s ruling in *Buck* other states also passed eugenics laws: Idaho, Utah, Minnesota, and Maine in 1925; Mississippi in 1928; West Virginia in 1929; Arizona in 1929; Vermont and Oklahoma in 1931; South Carolina in 1935; and

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139 *Smith v. Command* (note 86 above), 146 ff. (Justice Wiest, with whom Justices Fellows and Bird concurred, dissenting).
140 I rely here on Lombardo (note 5 above), pp.174-5. (The abbreviations in parentheses indicate the state in which a newspaper was published).
141 *Id.*
142 *Id.*, p. 76.
143 *Id.*, pp. 121-7, 136.
Georgia in 1937\textsuperscript{145}. Not surprisingly, either, legal challenges to such laws continued: for example, in 1933 the Supreme Court of North Carolina ruled that, because the state’s 1931 sterilization statute made no provision for notice and a hearing, it violated the “due process” clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution\textsuperscript{146}; in 1935 the Supreme Court of Alabama advised the Governor that a sterilization bill passed by the state legislature was unconstitutional for the same reason\textsuperscript{147}; and in 1942 a 1921 Washington law was also found to violate due process\textsuperscript{148}.

The same year, 1942, the U.S. Supreme Court returned to the subject of eugenics laws for the first time since 	extit{Buck}. 	extit{Skinner v. Oklahoma} was a test of the constitutionality of the Habitual Criminal Sterilization Act passed by the Oklahoma legislature in 1935, which provided that a person convicted twice or more of crimes “amounting to felonies involving moral turpitude” (in Oklahoma or any other state), and then convicted of a third such crime in Oklahoma, “shall be rendered sexually sterile”\textsuperscript{149}. Jack Skinner had been convicted in 1926 of stealing chickens, and in 1929 and again in 1934 of robbery with firearms. When the Act passed, he was an inmate in the Oklahoma state penitentiary; and the state Attorney General instituted proceedings to have him vasectomized\textsuperscript{150}.

Skinner argued that this violated his fourteenth amendment rights; and this time the Supreme Court agreed. By 1942, the standard of review of lower courts’ decisions on equal-protection claims was significantly more stringent than it had been in 1927, now requiring “strict scrutiny”\textsuperscript{151}. This case, the Court argued, was distinguishable from 	extit{Buck}: the Oklahoma law clearly violates the “equal protection” clause, since it mandates sterilizing someone convicted three times of larceny but not someone convicted three times of embezzlement – even though the nature of these crimes is the same, and they are (in other respects) punishable in the same manner\textsuperscript{152}.

Moreover, Justice Douglas continues:

We are dealing here with legislation which involves one of the basic rights of man. Marriage and procreation are fundamental to the very existence and survival of the race. The power to sterilize, if exercised, may have subtle, far reaching and devastating effects. In evil or reckless hands it can cause races or types which are inimical to the dominant group to wither and disappear\textsuperscript{153}.

What is most striking about this passage – besides the way it begins by announcing the existence of a “basic human right,” and then proceeds to interpret the Constitution so as plant the seed of a corresponding legal right – is that it suggests that public sentiment on the subject of eugenics had begun to shift, perhaps because the racial horrors of the Nazi re-

\textsuperscript{145} Lombardo (note 5 above), p. 294.
\textsuperscript{146} Brewer v. Valk, 204 N.C. 188, 167 S.E. Rptr. 638 (1933) (distinguishing the 1931 North Carolina statute from the Virginia statute at issue in 	extit{Buck} on the grounds that it did not provide for notice and hearing).
\textsuperscript{147} In re Opinion of the Justices, 162 Southern Rptr. 123 (1935) (distinguishing the proposed Alabama law from the Virginia statute at issue in 	extit{Buck} on the grounds that its procedural provisions were inadequate).
\textsuperscript{148} In re Hendrickson, 123 Pacific Rptr. 2d 323 (1942).
\textsuperscript{149} Okl.St.Ann. Tit 57, s 171 et seq; L.1935, pp. 94 et seq.
\textsuperscript{150} Skinner v. Oklahoma, 316 U.S. 535, 536 (1942).
\textsuperscript{152} Id., 538-9. Equal protection, the ruling continues, is compatible with distinguishing degrees of evil, but not with treating those convicted of the same degree of evil differently. Id., 540.
\textsuperscript{153} Id., 541.
gime had been known in the U.S. since 1935\(^{154}\). These dicta aside, however, *Skinner* still falls into the old legal pattern, invalidating the Oklahoma law on familiar constitutional grounds.

In 1953 J. E. Coogan argued that it was time for the Supreme Court to overturn *Buck*\(^{155}\), but this has never happened. In 1960, noting how easily they could be abused, the American Medical Association questioned the wisdom of eugenics laws\(^{156}\), but in 1962 a study by the Virginia Advisory Legislative Council found “no medical or other scientific data” to show that the 1924 statute needed revision\(^{157}\). And for many years after *Skinner* courts ruled other states’ compulsory-sterilization statutes constitutional. In 1968, for example, the Supreme Court of Nebraska — arguing that while the right to procreate is “a natural and constitutional right,” nonetheless “no citizen has any rights that are superior to the common welfare” — ruled in *Cavitt* that the state’s compulsory-sterilization law was constitutionally valid\(^{158}\).

By the time of *Cavitt*, however, it seems that mainstream scientific opinion had shifted significantly. In 1965, an article in the journal of the American Bar Association observed that “today’s authorities doubt” the supposed scientific basis for sterilization laws\(^{159}\), and Justice Smith’s dissenting opinion in *Cavitt* cited a then-recent statement by the South Dakota Medical Association (itself citing numerous articles and textbooks) to the effect that, with rare exceptions, it was by no means established that heredity is a factor in the development of mental disease\(^{160}\). The following year, a law review article pointed out that, because the number of people actually affected by a genetic defect is always small relative to the number of carriers, sterilizing only those in whom the gene is expressed would do little to wipe out the defect\(^{161}\). Nor, I should add, are the children of a mentally impaired parent always or inevitably similarly impaired.

The legal landscape had also begun to change in relevant ways through a series of decisions in which the Supreme Court’s Fourteenth Amendment jurisprudence evolved specifically in application to questions of marriage and reproduction. In *Loving* (1967) the Court struck down a Virginia statute making interracial marriage a crime, arguing that this violated “the central meaning of the Equal Protection clause”\(^{162}\). In *Eisenstadt v. Baird* (1972) the Court struck down a Massachusetts statute that permitted married but not single people to obtain contraceptives, recognizing “the right of an individual to be free of unwarranted government intrusion into matters ... [such] as the decision whether to bear or beget a child”\(^{163}\). And in *Roe v. Wade*, the Supreme Court’s landmark 1973 ruling on abortion, the Court held that “the right of personal privacy” allowed abortions in the first trimester of pregnancy, though it added that this right “is not unqualified, and must be considered

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\(^{154}\) Lombardo (note 5 above), p. 227 (noting that Georgia passed its sterilization law in 1937, after the horrors of the Nazi regime were beginning to be known).

\(^{155}\) Id., p 241.


\(^{158}\) In re. *Cavitt*, 157 N.W.2d 171 (Supreme Court of Nebraska, 1968). The quotation is from 175.


\(^{160}\) In re. *Cavitt* (note 158 above), 179-80.


\(^{162}\) Loving v. Commonwealth of Virginia, 87 S.Ct. 1817, 1823 (1967).

against important state interests in legislation,” so that “regulation limiting certain fundamental rights” may be justified by “a compelling state interest”\(^{164}\).

Between 1973 and 1983 ten states repealed their compulsory-sterilization laws\(^{165}\) – including Virginia, which in 1975 finally repealed the statute challenged in *Buck*. A couple of years later, in New York – where in 1912 a 1912 law authorizing sterilization of persons in institutions had been held unconstitutional under the equal protection clause – the Surrogate Court of Nassau County denied an application by the parents of D.D. (a severely retarded but physically well-developed 16-year-old) to have their daughter sterilized, arguing that to allow it would violate her fundamental right to bear children\(^{166}\). Other states, however, continued to uphold compulsory-sterilization statutes – notably, in 1977, North Carolina\(^{167}\). Since *Buck*, the state Supreme Court argues in *Moore*, many states had passed sterilization laws; and most had been found constitutional if “notice and a hearing are provided, if [the law] applied equally to all persons, and if [sterilization] is not prescribed as a punishment for a crime”\(^{168}\). The “fundamental right” articulated in *Roe v. Wade* was not unlimited, the ruling continues, and “the interest of the unborn child is sufficient to warrant sterilization in certain instances”\(^{169}\).

This legal saga is so fascinating that it’s tempting to keep going, and continue the story to the present day. But that would take a book; and anyway, it’s high time I returned to the questions about Holmes’s legal philosophy with which I began.

### IV. Lessons to be Learned

In the legal history briefly recounted here there is some confirmation of Holmes’s observations to the effect that what the law is depends on what judges (at least, I would add, what judges at the highest court) say it is. As Justice Driver wrote for the Supreme Court of Washington in 1942, “[s]ince the United States Supreme Court, in 1927, decided the case of *Buck v. Bell*, ‘it is considered settled that so far as its substantive features are concerned, a sterilization statute such as we have here is within the police power of a state’”\(^{170}\). Moreover, the story I have told provides confirmation of Holmes’s observations about the evolution of legal concepts – in this instance, of the concepts of equal protection and the right to privacy.

Of course, the story also reveals that what Holmes regarded (with good reason) as a deleterious confusion of legal and moral senses of the word “right” can also be a very effec-

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\(^{164}\) *Roe v. Wade*, 410 U.S. 113, 154-5.


\(^{166}\) *Matter of D.D.*, 90 Misc.2d 236 (1977). (It is worth noting that the parents’ concern wasn’t that D.D.’s children would also be retarded, but that, with a mental age of less than five, their daughter was quite incapable of caring for a child).

\(^{167}\) The statute at issue, which came into effect in January 1975, “sought to correct the defects found in the former statute.” In re *Sterilization of Moore*, 321 S.E. 307 (1976), 309, 310. On the complicated history of North Carolina sterilization statutes, see Fischman (note 165 above), pp. 1202 ff.

\(^{168}\) *Id.*, 309. On the history of such cases, the court cites Validity of Statutes Authorizing Asexualization of Criminals or Mental Defectives, 53 A.L.R.3d 960 (1973).

\(^{169}\) *Id.*, 312. (The question that springs to mind, of course, is: “what unborn child?”).

\(^{170}\) In re *Hendrickson* (note 148 above), 324 (italics mine). (Recall that the ruling held the Washington statute unconstitutional not in substance, but for lack of adequate procedures).
tive rhetorical tool for bringing about legal change. As we saw in *Skinner*, the argument that a legal provision violates a fundamental moral right can motivate the first steps towards the creation of a corresponding legal right.

In the early decades of the twentieth century, Nils Roll-Hansen reminds us, eugenics was “a science-based movement to combat threatening degeneration, ... initiated by idealistic scientists ... and inspired by a humanistic Enlightenment ideal”[172]. Legal rulings, as we saw, reflected this. So Holmes’s ruling in *Buck* arguably conforms to his advice, in “The Path of the Law,” that when considering what interpretation of the law would be for the good of society, judges look to the sciences.

Of course, the story recounted here also reveals the danger that the science to which judges look may be weak, over-simplified, out-of-date or, even if it is sound, poorly understood by policy makers and lawyers[173] – a danger of which Clarence Darrow had warned in 1926, while *Buck* was on appeal[174]. This is not to suggest that Holmes’s advice that judges look to the sciences was inherently flawed – it was good advice, up to a point; but it is to say that judges should exercise considerable caution not to take the reliability of plausible-sounding but poorly established and perhaps seriously flawed scientific work too readily for granted.

The rise of eugenics laws in the U.S. and elsewhere clearly reflected prevailing moral and social attitudes, and the way such laws subsequently fell into disrepute clearly reflected significant changes in moral and social sensibilities; confirming Holmes’s idea that the evolution of a legal system reflects the moral evolution of the community. And most importantly for present purposes, this story also provides confirmation of Holmes’s moral fallibilism, his sense that what truly contributes to the greater good of society isn’t something of which judges (or anyone) can be certain.

In the early decades of the last century many legislators and judges, Holmes included, were evidently convinced that eugenics laws would prevent crime and degeneracy, physical, mental, and moral, and so serve “considerations of social advantage” – that they were, like laws requiring vaccinations or the isolation of patients suffering from certain communicable diseases, small sacrifices demanded of individuals for the greater good of society. But already in 1926 Darrow had expressed alarm at “the sureness of the advocates of this new [eugenicist] dream ... their ruthlessness in meddling with life ... their stern righteousness,”[175] and warned of “the pain and suffering that men have inflicted upon each other by their coxsureness and their meddling.”[176] And to us, now – knowing what do about how catastrophic Nazi race laws, especially, proved to be, and accustomed to thinking of a person’s right to privacy and reproductive freedom as unassailable – the Supreme Court’s rul-
ing in *Buck* seems both politically naive and morally blind; but to them, then, it seemed an entirely reasonable sacrifice to ask of individuals for the welfare of society, a moral step forward.

Don’t get me wrong. I’m not saying that Holmes’s ruling in *Buck* was a morally good one given what he thought he knew about the heritability of feeble-mindedness; only that—even though, by my lights, this ruling manifested a real failure of moral imagination and judgment—this failure was understandable given what Holmes and his colleagues thought they knew. Reading *Buck*, I find myself wishing that Holmes and his colleagues had even half of Darrow’s, or Chesterton’s, ability to see the potential for abuse in such laws. But I have learned from Holmes to reflect that others—for example, Chinese friends accustomed to many years of the “one-child” policy, and with a long cultural history of stress on social cohesion over individual rights—might disagree; and to acknowledge that it’s hard not to feel some sympathy for the parents of children like D.D.

Hence my conclusion: For all his Olympian detachment, Holmes was only human—made up, like the rest of us, “of insight and blindness, pettiness and grandeur”. He was absolutely right to stress that it is a “misfortune” when a judge “reads his conscious or unconscious sympathy with one side or the other”—or his own moral convictions—prematurely into the law. The fact that Holmes failed to practice, in *Buck*, what he preached in “The Path of the Law,” shouldn’t blind us to the importance of this pragmatist theoretical insight.

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179 See note 106 above.


181 My thanks to Maribel Narvaez, for comments on an earlier paper of mine that suggested the topic for the present paper; to Mark Migotti, for helpful comments on a draft; and to Pamela Lucken, for skilled help in finding relevant materials.
Patricia Hill Collins

Piecing Together a Genealogical Puzzle: Intersectionality and American Pragmatism

Abstract. The emergence of intersectionality and the reemergence of American pragmatism within the academy in the late-twentieth century raises some provocative issues. On the surface, intersectionality and American pragmatism appear to be very different entities, yet emphasizing their differences may overlook deeper connections that might benefit both discourses. Using a genealogical method, this essay explores one core question: how might intersectionality and American pragmatism as knowledge projects inform each other? The body of the essay presents an abbreviated analysis of the structural and symbolic contours of each knowledge project so that the theme of their potential dialogical relationship can be investigated. The essay concludes by examining three areas of convergence that emerge from this preliminary dialogue, namely, themes of experience, complex social inequalities and conceptions of social action.

By the early-twenty-first century, intersectionality and American pragmatism became increasingly visible discourses within U.S. academic institutions. On the surface, intersectionality and American pragmatism appear to be very different entities. Intersectionality is the newcomer on the block, an interdisciplinary discourse that, despite being only a few decades old reaches across a range of fields¹. Prevailing narratives identify critical race theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw’s use of the term intersectionality in 1989 and 1991 to mark the emergence of intersectionality as a named discourse within the academy. In its over two decades as a named discourse, the ideas of intersectionality have not yet crystallized into a standard canon defined by its founding figures. Rather, intersectional scholarship and/or practice seemingly pivot on a loose set of shared ideas, namely, (1) how race, class, gender and sexuality constitute intersecting systems of power; (2) how specific social inequalities reflect these power relations from one setting to the next; (3) how identities of race, gender, are socially constructed within multiple systems of power; and (4) how social problems and their remedies are similarly constructed within intersecting systems of power. In contrast, American pragmatism has a much longer history and a broader set of practitioners. American pragmatism is typically understood as a late-nineteenth, early twentieth century philosophical tradition that is associated with the ideas of several prominent intellectuals, most notably, Charles Peirce, William James, John Dewey and George Herbert Mead. Canon formation for American pragmatism is thus anchored in ideas of key founding figures, primarily founding fathers, rather than intersectionality’s more fluid collective set of ideas that

¹ Currently housed within a broad and interdisciplinary body of scholarship, the idea of intersectionality weaves across multiple disciplines, garnering increasing acceptance within social science fields as diverse as sociology, psychology, economics, and political science. Fields that have been oriented to public practice have shown a special receptivity to intersectionality. For example, intersectionality’s close affinity with legal scholarship, specifically Critical Race Theory and LatCrit theory, highlights the ways in which the analytical strategies of intersectionality have been cultivated in an intellectual context explicitly devoted to social action and change. Similarly, the field of public policy finds utility in intersectional analyses for understanding how intersectional social locations impact life choices. Intersectionality has also made significant contributions to the field of public health, where social determinants of health disparities are increasingly approached from intersectional perspectives. For a discussion and relevant citations for these literatures, see (Collins & Chepp, forthcoming)
are shared by a group. The ideas of American pragmatism constitute a canon, yet its practitioners neither agree on its membership nor its main ideas.

These differences of longevity, practitioners, and canonical status distinguish intersectionality and American pragmatism, yet emphasizing differences may overlook deeper connections that might benefit both fields of study. The emergence of intersectionality and the reemergence of American pragmatism at this particular time within the academy does raise some provocative issues. In what ways, if any, might the emergence of intersectionality and American pragmatism be interrelated phenomena? Moreover, what relationship, if any, exists among the objectives, thematic content and epistemological approaches of intersectionality and American pragmatism?

Because these are very large questions, this paper focuses on one exploratory question: how might intersectionality and American pragmatism as knowledge projects inform each other? To explore this question, this essay relies on three core ideas. First, I conceptualize intersectionality and American pragmatism as knowledge projects that might fruitfully be placed in dialogue. Because all knowledge projects remain under construction, conceptualizing intersectionality and American pragmatism as knowledge projects might affirm current areas of emphasis within each project as well as suggest provocative new avenues of investigation for each. Second, I conceptualize these knowledge projects as being defined by their structural and symbolic boundaries (Lamont and Molnár 2002). Structural boundaries refer to the social relations that shape a knowledge project, whereas symbolic boundaries describe the content of a field, namely, the ideas that lie within its framework and those that are excluded. Third, because I conceptualize intersectionality and American pragmatism as knowledge projects, they lend themselves to a genealogical approach. Their relational

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2 In this essay, I conceptualize intersectionality and American pragmatism as knowledge projects. A sociology of knowledge framework suggests that knowledge is socially constructed and transmitted, legitimated and reproduced by social mechanisms deeply intertwined (intersecting) social systems of power (P. L. Berger & Luckmann, 1966). My understanding of the term “project” parallels Michael Omi and Howard Winant’s definition of racial formations and racial projects. They note: “We define racial formation as the sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed. We argue that racial formation is a process of historically situated projects in which human bodies and social structures are represented and organized” (Omi & Winant, 1994, 55-56). Stuhrl’s description of American pragmatism parallels my approach to both fields: “it may be defined by its exponents’ common attitudes, purposes, philosophical problems, procedures, terminology, and beliefs. It is in virtue of such a shared complex of features that we identify, understand, and differentiate philosophical developments, movements, and ‘schools of thought.’” Such a unity of character, we must recognize, is not a single and simple essence, some necessary and sufficient feature of classical American philosophy, some property present always and only in classical American philosophy. Instead, it is an identifiable configuration, a characteristic shape, a resemblance, an overlapping and interweaving of features (present to differing degrees in the writings of the individual philosophers) that, as a relational whole, pervades and constitutes this philosophy and these philosophers” (Stuhrl, 2000, 2-3). In this essay, I use the terms narrative, discourse and canon interchangeably, although there are nuances. I approach intersectionality and American pragmatism as broader knowledge projects that may have additional aspects beyond their formal content of their ideas.

3 Approaching these fields of inquiry as knowledge projects enables me to analyze the changing configurations of symbolic and structural boundaries that characterize intersectionality and American pragmatism. Structural and symbolic boundaries are intimately linked in that structural power arrangements legitimate ideas that can work to uphold and/or challenge the social structural organization of a field of inquiry. Using an internalist framework to analyze a canon means looking solely at the ideas themselves, namely the symbolic contours untethered from structural power relations. Yet ignoring the structural contours of discourse, knowledge project or canon can foster a superficial understanding of a discourse’s symbolic contours. For both American pragmatism and intersectionality, it mattered greatly who advanced knowledge claims, the social context in which they advanced them, and the power relations that housed these structural and symbolic phenomena.

Here I draw upon Foucault’s discourse analysis, in particular, his notions of discourse as characterized by periods of ascendency and decline. See “Two Lectures” (Foucault, 1980). Whereas I do not see pragmatism exclusively as a middle class, American project, this essay is informed by Cornel West’s description of genealogy in his...
tionship constitutes an unfolding genealogical puzzle, with potential and actual points of contact between these two knowledge projects refracted through this framework of structural and symbolic boundaries.

This paper explores its core question, namely, how might intersectionality and American pragmatism as knowledge projects inform each other, by using a genealogical method to conceptualize intersectionality and American pragmatism as knowledge projects with dynamic structural and symbolic contours. Part I of the paper introduces the main ideas of intersectionality as a knowledge project as it traveled from social movement settings into American higher education. Part II takes a similar approach to American pragmatism. Part III draws from the greatly abbreviated analysis of each knowledge project in Parts I and II to investigate the theme of their potential dialogical relationship. Placing these two knowledge projects in dialogue suggests three potential points of contact, namely, their respective approaches to experience, social inequality and action.

Narratives of Intersectionality

Although Black feminism was a significant factor in catalyzing the guiding frame of intersectionality, contemporary narratives concerning the emergence of intersectionality as a knowledge project routinely ignore its links to Black feminist politics of the 1960s and 1970s. Yet examining the works of African American feminists suggest that this form of subjugated knowledge that broke though within social movement politics provides an important angle of vision for intersectionality’s genealogy. For example, Toni Cade Bambara’s edited volume, *The Black Woman*, published in 1970 stands as a groundbreaking volume of work by African American women who were involved in political struggle that can be read as a text of intersectional analysis (Bambara, 1970). Taking an implicitly intersectional stance toward African American women’s emancipation, African American women from diverse political perspectives presented provocative essays concerning how Black women would never gain their freedom without attending to race and class and gender. Written for the general public and not an academic audience, this volume can be seen as one important albeit overlooked early work within intersectionality as a knowledge project.

By the 1980s, some of the main ideas honed within the context of Black women’s activism became crystallized within pamphlets, poetry, essays, edited volumes, art and other creative venues. In 1982, the Combahee River Collective, a small group of African American women in Boston, issued a position paper titled “A Black Feminist Statement” that laid out a more comprehensive statement of the framework that had permeated Black feminist politics (Combahee-River-Collective, 1995). This groundbreaking document argued that race-only or gender-only frameworks advanced partial and incomplete analyses of the social injustices that characterize African American women’s lives, and that race, gender, social class and sexuality all shaped Black women’s experiences. The Statement proposed that what had been treated as separate systems of oppression were interconnected. Because racism, class exploitation, patriarchy and homophobia collectively shaped Black women’s experiences, Black women’s liberation required a comprehensive response to multiple systems of oppression. June Jordan’s succinct statement about freedom encapsulates the think-
ing of the times: “Freedom is indivisible or it is nothing at all besides sloganeering and temporary, short-sighted, and short-lived advancement for a few. Freedom is indivisible, and either we are working for freedom or you are working for the sake of your self-interests and I am working for mine” (Jordan, 1992, 190). Here Jordan’s discussion of freedom foreshadows important ideas within intersectional knowledge projects, namely, viewing the task of understanding complex social inequalities as inextricably linked to a social justice agenda, or, the intersections not just of ideas themselves, but of ideas and actions.

Given the historical derogation of women of African descent, it is tempting to grant African American women ownership over the “discovery” of a yet unnamed intersectionality. Yet it is clear that African American women were part of a broader women’s movement where Chicanas and other Latinas, native women and Asian American women (who subsequently became redefined collectively as women of color) were at the forefront of raising claims about the interconnectedness of race, class, gender and sexuality in their everyday lived experience. The Combahee River Collective was not alone in proposing these ideas. In the United States, for example, Latinas were engaged in similar intellectual and political struggles to create space for their empowerment within the confines of social movement politics that, like Black politics, were shaped by a patriarchal nationalism. Latina feminism came of age during these same decades of the 1970s and 1980s, with the work of Gloria Anzaldúa, especially her classic volume *Borderlands/La Frontera* making an important contribution in framing studies of race, class and gender and sexuality (Anzaldúa, 1987). Anzaldúa’s work in particular sets the stage for examining important contemporary themes such as border space, boundaries and relationality, that have subsequently become so prominent within contemporary intersectionality.

Examining how women of color approached the task of their own empowerment demonstrates varying patterns of how race/class/gender/sexuality were negotiated in the context of social movement politics. For example, African American women and Chicanas confronted the task of incorporating gender into prevailing race/class analyses of the Black and Chicano nationalist movements, as well as incorporating race and class into a feminist movement that advanced gender only arguments. In this context, women of color’s analyses about intersections of race/class/gender/sexuality were honed in the intersections of multiple social movements, a structural location that had an important effect on the symbolic dimensions of ensuing intersectional discourse.

The transitional decade of the 1980s proved to be significant, not only for the codification of the ideas of women of color in documents they produced themselves, but also as a period where social movements moved into phases of abeyance. Yet the seeming waning of social movements constituted a shift in the structural contours of knowledge projects that saw race, class, gender and sexuality as mutually constructing systems of power (referred to hereon as race/class/gender studies) as well as the venues where the symbolic contours of race/class/gender studies could develop. Women of color arguing for the interconnections of race, class, gender and sexuality continued to produce documents within social movement politics, these same women were active in social movement politics. At the same time, many of these same women entered the academy as graduate students, instructors and assistant professors. It is important to remember that had social movements not fought for the inclusion of women and people of color inside the academy, that ideas that they brought

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5 Using contemporary terms to describe an entity that was emerging and that had not yet been named remains challenging. Astute readers should notice that, despite the incorporation of sexuality within the work of prominent Black feminists, sexuality did not emerge on equal footing or necessarily intersecting with race, class and gender during this period of academic incorporation.
with them were unlikely to have gained acceptance. The case of African American women is instructive in this regard. Alice Walker, June Jordan, Angela Davis, Nikki Giovanni, and Barbara Smith to name a few, all were actively engaged in social movements, specifically, the Civil Rights, anti-war, Black Power, women’s and/or gay liberation movements. Gaining access to academic positions enabled politically active African American women to bring ideas from Black feminist politics with them into the academy through dual streams of Black feminism and race/class/gender studies. Major works by African American women that established the groundwork for what came to be known as intersectionality included June Jordan’s *Civil Wars* (Jordan, 1981); Audre Lorde’s classic volume *Sister Outsider* (Lorde, 1984); and Angela Davis’s groundbreaking volume *Women, Race and Class* (Davis, 1981). In works such as these, one can see how Black women’s intellectual production contained an explicit analysis of the interconnectedness of race, class, gender and sexuality as systems of power that was explicitly tied to varying social justice projects catalyzed by their involvement in social movement politics (Collins, 2000). Again, this embrace of race/class/gender studies was not limited to African American women.

By this expansion into the academy, the more fluid structural and symbolic boundaries of race/class/gender studies as a knowledge project that was honed within social movements found itself fighting for space and legitimacy within prevailing academic politics. Specifically, as academic incorporation unfolded, the strategies and arguments associated with race/class/gender studies shifted. The seemingly undisciplined yet creative politics of race/class/gender studies associated with social movement politics became recast as a more disciplined, recognizable and increasingly legitimated field of inquiry.

The term *intersectionality* emerged in this border space between social movement and academic politics as a term that seemed to best capture the fluidity of intersectionality as a knowledge project. Ironically, narratives of the emergence of intersectionality rarely include this period of social movement politics, and instead confine themselves to locating a point of origin when academics first noticed, named and legitimized this emerging field of study. It’s as if the ideas associated with race/class/gender studies did not exist until they were recognized by institutional actors, primarily by giving the emerging field a legitimate and easily transportable name. Stock stories of the emergence of intersectionality routinely claim that Kimberlé Crenshaw “coined” the term intersectionality in her *Stanford Law Review* article “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color” (K. W. Crenshaw, 1991). Interestingly, Crenshaw’s earlier 1989 article also provides an important window into her conception of intersectionality, yet is not as widely cited as the 1991 article (K. Crenshaw, 1989). Ironically, despite the fact that Crenshaw’s article is typically invoked as a point of origin for a given author’s own rendition of intersectionality, Crenshaw’s ideas are less often analyzed on their own terms.

Crenshaw’s 1989 and 1991 articles mark a juncture when the ideas of social movement politics became named and subsequently incorporated into the academy. When read together, both articles provide a provocative angle of vision on intersectionality as so-called travelling theory, specifically the ideas that became increasingly associated with intersectionality and those shrank in importance (Knapp, 2005). Because Crenshaw’s 1991 article is most often cited as the point of origin for intersectionality, here I’ll briefly discuss its main points.

A close reading of Kimberlé Crenshaw’s 1991 article does two things: (1) it identifies several main ideas of intersectionality that reappear within subsequent intersectional knowledge projects; and (2) it provides a clearer view of the interrelationship of structural and symbolic boundaries in the development of intersectionality as a knowledge project, espe-
cially what persisted, what became muted, and what disappeared. Stated differently, although routinely not read in this fashion, Crenshaw’s article provides a glimpse of the structural and symbolic boundaries of intersectionality as a knowledge project at a point in time when a significant genealogical shift occurred away from social movement politics and toward academic incorporation.

Several features of Crenshaw’s 1991 article foreshadow subsequent focal points within intersectionality (for an expansive discussion of these ideas, see (Collins & Chepp, forthcoming). First, Crenshaw focuses on the experiences of women of color, a devalued group not just from the perspective of the academy, but also from society overall. Crenshaw argues that the experiences of women of color are important in and of themselves, but become especially significant in understanding and remedying important social issues. In a move that builds on her earlier article, Crenshaw places herself within her narrative where she self-identifies as a “Black Feminist.” Via this move, Crenshaw signals a particular epistemological stance for the scholar in the social construction of knowledge. Experience and embodied knowledge are valorized, as is the theme of responsibility that accompanies such knowledge. In this piece, Crenshaw is working within the tenets of standpoint epistemology, acknowledging that experience broadly defined matters, not simply in incorporating the experiences of the excluded, but also in seeing women of color as differentially placed knowers and knowledge-creators. Distinctive angles of vision and challenges accompany differential social locations, a theme developed via Crenshaw’s attention to the different experiences that women of color have with domestic violence. All discourses come from a particular standpoint, yet those of women of color are often obscured.

Second, Crenshaw argues that the needs of women of color cannot be met by monocategorical thinking. Crenshaw’s innovation here lies in building her argument from the ground up from the experiences of women of color and then showing how multiple systems of power affect their lives not in a prioritized fashion, but instead, in a synergistic fashion. Mutually constructing systems of power produce distinctive social locations for individuals and groups within them, in this case, the disempowered identities that women of color carried that positioned them within complex social inequalities differently than white men or white women.

Third, Crenshaw’s article contains an emphasis on relationality. By introducing the term “intersectionality,” Crenshaw implicitly questions the nature of the relations among the entities that are intersecting. Crenshaw draws from the ideas of women of color developed in actual social movements who came to see that this issue of relationships was crucial — it was not enough to have a common enemy, rather, they had to figure out patterns of interconnectedness. Her argument carries this nuance in that Crenshaw includes several groups under the umbrella category “women of color,” with attention to the specificity and universals of their experiences with domestic violence. This attentiveness to relationality and its significance for coalitional politics finds an important framework in this piece. The theme of relationality permeated social movements as they had to figure out how various individuals and social movements might work together.

Fourth, Crenshaw’s article expresses a social justice ethos that assumes that more comprehensive analyses of social problems will yield more effective social actions in response. Why write this article on women of color and violence at all, if not to provide some insight for social justice initiatives? Echoing Jordan’s call that freedom is indivisible, achieving social justice for victims of domestic violence requires understanding race, class, gender and sexuality as mutually constructing systems of power. Ironically, the analysis of intersecting systems of power is secondary to the primary reason of social betterment, in this
case, social betterment for women of color and for everyone else by implication. Important-
ly, Crenshaw is a legal scholar, and this disciplinary location might have fostered a greater
attentiveness to social justice as an important dimension of intersectionality’s symbolic di-
ensions during the era of social movement politics.

Crenshaw’s article provides a useful snapshot of an important moment of transition of
contemporary canon formation when intersectionality as an ostensibly novel construct tra-
velled into the academy and was changed by its new social location. The academic context
has a set of norms that are used to legitimate intellectual production, namely, that scholar-
ship be objective, e.g., apolitical, decontextualized and abstract. Interestingly, Crenshaw’s
piece was differently objective in that it did not claim these three categories yet presented a
tightly argued linear argument supported by considerable empirical evidence. Ironically, as
the structural contours of social movement politics of the 1960s and 1970s receded into the
past, intersectionality’s incorporation into the academy in the 1990s and 2000s seemingly
uncoupled this knowledge project from politics. Intersectionality as a knowledge project
shifted from bottom-up knowledge projects reflected in Crenshaw’s ability to draw from
grassroots politics, to top-down knowledge projects whose structural contours were increa-
singly shaped by the normative practices of the academy, and whose symbolic contours re-
lected the objectives, thematic content and epistemological approaches of existing fields of
study.

Since 1991, intersectionality as a knowledge project has expanded in the academy, gai-
ning acceptance in many fields of study. Specifically, Women’s Studies constitutes as one
important interdisciplinary field that took intersectionality seriously and where scholarship
most closely embraces the kind of robust social analysis evident in Crenshaw’s article (see,
e.g., Racialized Boundaries: Race, Nation, Gender, Colour and Class and the Anti-Racist
Struggle, by Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis or Methodology of the Oppressed by
Chela Sandoval (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1992; Sandoval, 2000). As an interdisciplinary
field that drew practitioners from a wide range of disciplinary backgrounds, Women’s Stu-
dies was at the forefront of curriculum transformation projects. Over time, other interdisci-
plinary fields of study drew upon intersectionality, most notably, cultural studies. Academic
disciplines also demonstrated uneven patterns of incorporation of intersectionality. Intersec-
tionality also found fertile ground in fields such as literature and history that valued nar-
rative traditions and experiential knowledge. In contrast, social sciences that relied on qua-
titative scientific paradigms using large scale data sets came later to intersectionality. For
example, political scientists expressed increased interest in intersectionality in the 2000s,
bringing an important angle of vision to the field (Hancock, 2007). Border disciplines be-
tween the humanities and the “hard” social sciences fell somewhere in between. Sociology,
for example, was well-positioned to develop intersectional analyses in that (1) race and
class were long established sub-fields; (2) the field had long incorporated both humanistic
and scientific paradigms; and (3) the field was characterized by diversity of practitioners,
some of whom like Bonnie Thornton Dill, and Evelyn Glenn were cognizant of the signi-
ficance of social movement politics to the inception of the field (Collins, 2007).

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\[Crenshaw’s piece may have been so well-received, in part, because it demonstrated the ability to fuse the sensibilities of social movement politics and its commitment to social justice initiatives with sophisticated theoretical perspectives, in particular, the growing significance of postmodern and poststructuralist analyses within the late-twentieth-century American academy. Crenshaw thus spoke to two audiences within academia, namely, those with a social movement background who understood the social justice ethos of the piece, and a readership that recognized the theoretical framework that Crenshaw invoked.\]
Despite the significance of these and other works for scholars and researchers, the real work of establishing a field lies in building a base of undergraduate and graduate students, thus ensuring that the next generation of practitioners will emerge. In this regard, edited volumes become especially important because they “bundle” articles in ways that provide a roadmap for a field of study. Edited volumes thus shape the parameters of the field, for example, Andersen and Collins’ *Race, Class and Gender: An Anthology*, now in its eighth edition (Andersen & Collins 2011). As a parallel development, edited volumes that draw upon variations of the term *intersectionality* and that incorporate selected key articles that helped shaped this field of inquiry have begun to appear. For example, Berger and Guidroz’s *The Intersectional Approach: Transforming the Academy through Race, Class & Gender* seems reminiscent of curriculum transformation projects whereby women aimed to change institutional structures that produce knowledge (M. Berger & Guidroz, 2009). In contrast, Dill and Zambrana’s *Emerging Intersections: Race, Class, and Gender in Theory, Policy, and Practice* sample of social science research where intersectional frameworks are apparent provides a framework for thinking through intersectional research (Dill & Zambrana, 2009). Emerging within gender studies in a German context, Lutz et al’s *Framing Intersectionality: Debates on a Multi-Faceted Concept in Gender Studies* volume illustrates how a different national context shifts patterns of emphasis, especially concerning the theme of masculinity (Lutz, Vivar, & Supik, 2011).

Interestingly, the volume by Lutz et al foreshadows some challenges to the prevailing narrative on intersectionality as well as challenges to the substance of the field itself. Not only can the prevailing narrative of intersectionality be unsettled by moving beyond assumptions of its American origins, the historical frame for intersectionality as a knowledge project may also be too narrow. The preceding analysis of Crenshaw’s 1991 article aimed to challenge both the growing acceptance of this point of origin within intersectionality’s genealogy and to suggest that starting the analysis of intersectionality earlier in social movement politics, specifically in late-twentieth-century social movement politics, might yield a more robust analysis of intersectionality. Yet choosing varying points of origin most likely will yield different genealogies of this field, especially reviewing earlier knowledge projects that may not have used the term intersectionality, but that may have expressed a similar ethos.

Examining the works of Ida Wells-Barnett, Anna Julia Cooper and turn-of-the-twentieth century African American women thinkers may be useful in determining another point of origin for a genealogy of intersectionality. Cooper and Wells-Barnett both advanced intersectional arguments against the dominant discourse of their times. Anna Julia Cooper’s belief that “when and where I enter, then shall all enter with me,” a major theme of her classic volume *A Voice from the South*, argues that no one can be free unless Black women gain their freedom (Cooper, 1892). From Cooper’s perspective as a highly educated African American woman living in the Jim Crow South, freedom required more complex arguments and accompanying politics than race-only or class-only endeavors. She inserted gender into the race/class thinking of Black social and political thought, taking a position that predates Crenshaw by close to a century concerning the intersecting nature of oppressions that affected African American women. In this regard, her analysis resembles June Jordan’s construct of indivisible freedom, or the Combahee River Collective’s identity politics that made Black women central and not marginal to political theory and action. Wells-Barnett pushed an intersectional analysis even further and created a scandal by writing about the centrality of race, gender and sexuality to the prevailing practice of lynching (Collins, 2002). The work of Cooper, Wells-Barnett and others foreshadowed analyses of African
American women’s and men’s oppression as situated at race, class, gender and sexuality as intersecting systems of power. At the same time, Wells-Barnett, Cooper and similar African American women thinkers routinely struggled with both Black men and white women who often used mono-categorical thinking to refute the racism, sexism and class exploitation justified by dominant discourse.

The major ideas of contemporary Black feminism that are subsequently recast as race/class/gender studies then submerged within an academic discourse on intersectionality permeate the work of early twentieth-century African American feminists. For example, themes such as the significance of the experiences of Black women and points of view that those embodied experiences might engender, the significance of intersectional analyses of mutually constructing systems of power in Black women’s lives, the relationality of complex worldviews such as those of Black and white women, or Black women and men, and of social justice as central to their political program, summarized in their slogan “lifting as we climb,” all appear as themes of visionary pragmatism in the works of these early Black feminists. Yet why might these ideas have appeared when they did and taken the form that they did among this population?

Here it is important to point out that intersectionality as a knowledge project may seem new, but that intersectional analyses need not be expressions of the types of social justice agendas that have permeated the work of African American women thinkers. Anna Julia Cooper and Ida Wells-Barnett, as well as their better-known contemporaries Charles Peirce and William James, all were reacting to a broader intellectual and political context valorized science in defense of social inequality. Despite the variability among their practitioners, Black feminism and American pragmatism both emerged as alternatives to the positivist, deterministic frameworks associated with eugenics thinking. Eugenics discourse, a biologically deterministic, legitimated scientific discourse of the period of both early modern Black feminism and American pragmatism, unabashedly expressed racist, sexist, and anti-immigrant sensibilities. Moreover, turn-of-the-twentieth-century eugenics discourse advanced by Frances Galton and others offered explicitly intersectional analyses of complex social inequalities that helped construct and defend social injustice (Galton, 1904). It stands to reason that those who bore the full brunt of eugenicist thinking about race, gender, sexuality and class, specifically, African American women, would be more likely to advance social justice arguments that were similarly intersectional than those with greater social privilege.

This move back into time that uses Black women’s intellectual production as a navigational compass potentially expands contemporary understandings of the genealogy of intersectionality as well as that of American pragmatism. Incorporating late-nineteenth, early twentieth century African American women’s intellectual history into the emerging contemporary intersectionality canon suggests that this canon may suffer from temporal myopia. Moreover, it may be no coincidence that this same period of time when Cooper and Wells-Barnett were active is also routinely identified as the same period of time for the emergence of classical American pragmatism. Moving intersectionality back to this particular period of time highlights the significance of this same historical moment as a contested point of origin for both genealogies. In a similar fashion, intersectionality and pragmatism in the contemporary period may express similar sensibilities.
Narratives of American Pragmatism

American pragmatism has a much longer recognized history than intersectionality and, as such, lends itself to different analytical strategies. For intersectionality as a knowledge project, one can engage in a close reading of Crenshaw’s work to illustrate an important turning point in the genealogy of the field. In contrast, the vast array of works that are recognized as legitimately belonging within American pragmatism make this an impossible approach. In light of the magnitude of this task, here I’ll present a very brief overview of the recognized history of the field, a summary that provides a basic introduction to the structural contours of the field. I’ll then move on to the symbolic contours by summarizing pragmatism’s recognized focal points. These focal points may have received varying degrees of emphasis during different historical eras, and within different academic disciplines. Yet collectively, they do mark the symbolic boundaries of American pragmatism in that people working within the field are aware of these focal points, even if they express varying degrees of agreement or disagreement with one another concerning them (Stuhr, 2000).

American pragmatism is a much broader and historically complex field of inquiry than intersectionality. This longevity means that using secondary works from and about the field as well as selected works by key figures in the field, one can identify the structural boundaries of the field, specifically its history and patterns of its ascendency, quiescence and re-emergence. Standard accounts of American pragmatism approach it as a subfield of philosophy, whose classic or “old” version emerged in the American context over a fifty year period from late-1800s to the mid-1940s. Charles Peirce, William James, John Dewey and Charles Herbert Mead are routinely mentioned as seminal figures in the classical pragmatist canon (Gross, 2007, 188; Haack, 2006; Joas, 1993, 4). Classical pragmatism ostensibly found “new” expressions in the contemporary period (Haack, 2006). Peirce, James, Dewey and Mead are typically included in renditions of the “old” canon, yet the list of thinkers who appear in the “new” is far more provisional. Broadening beyond the disciplinary boundary of philosophy to incorporate other disciplines, national contexts and/or a broader time period positions a diverse array of thinkers within the pragmatist canon, among them, Ralph Waldo Emerson (West, 1989, 9-41); William E.B. Du Bois (Posnock, 1998; West, 1989, 138-149); Jürgen Habermas (Joas, 1993, 125-153); Jane Addams (Seigfried, 1996); and Benjamin Franklin (Campbell, 1999; Pratt, 2002).

Because the field is so expansive, here I review several focal points that provide some orienting constructs for the symbolic contours of American pragmatism, especially its revi-
talization in the contemporary period. First, American pragmatism emphasizes the significance of social context in the construction of knowledge. Pragmatism is always contextual in that it understands things in relational terms and not in isolation. Rather than viewing the world as consisting of essences existing in and of themselves, pragmatism approaches the social world as a series of contexts that shape the meaning and value of words, ideas, people, and institutions that are engaged in complex relationships. Pragmatism is thus concerned with understanding social phenomena that are conceptualized as dynamic and always in formation" (Dickstein, 1998, 8).

Second, this emphasis on context valorizes the experiences that people have across diverse social formations. Eschewing commodified understandings of experience as essentialized entities that can be categorized and used to illustrate some overarching social theory, pragmatism places far more emphasis on experiences as negotiated by people’s interactions with their social contexts. People do not passively receive or undergo experiences. Rather, experiences result from people’s active engagement with their social worlds. The phrase “situated creativity” within specific social contexts captures this robust understanding of experience whereby people creatively construct their environments and whereby their environments shape human subjectivity.

A third dimension of American pragmatism concerns its focus on how transactional processes link experiences and social context. Rather than conceptualizing communities or democracy as finished, idealized constructs that humans try to actualize, constructs such as these are created via pragmatic action. This commitment to transactional processes within pragmatism fosters an understanding of the social self and one that is embedded in a social context. As Stuhr points out, “existence is social in a deeper, ontologically more important sense…: the individual is intrinsically constituted by and in his or her social relations; the self is fundamentally a social self… Mead develops this most fully: the self is ‘essentially a social structure, and it arises in social experience’; it is thus impossible to conceive to a self arising outside of a social context” (Stuhr, 2000, 7).

A fourth dimension of American pragmatism concerns its anti-foundationalist orientation. Pragmatism is unlikely to advance knowledge-claims that are absolute, for example, claims about the persisting reality of racism, or sexism, or the need for an ethos of social justice as a touchstone for its own project. In contrast to anti-racist projects, for example, that typically rest on the foundationalist assumption that racism is real and must be countered, pragmatism makes no such claims. This anti-foundationalist orientation limits pragmatism’s potential as a political project in that projects with political goals typically embrace some sort of foundationalist premise that pulls their members together, for example, social justice as an ethical stance used to assess the integrity of one’s project.

This leads to the fifth orientation of American pragmatism, namely, its status as a methodology that advances specific techniques in approaching the social world, rather than

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9 There appear to be just as many versions of American pragmatism as there are American pragmatists. For useful taxonomies, see De Waal (2005); Dickstein (1998); Glaude (2007); Gross (2007); Haack (2006); Joas (1993); Menand (1997); Stuhr (2000); and West (1989).

10 On the one hand, this anti-foundationalism can be seen as a critical response to the foundationalist projects advanced within Western knowledge, for example, the biologically determinist eugenics projects described earlier. Part of this anti-foundationalism lies in pragmatism’s space for diversity and heterogeneity. As Dickstein points out, “pragmatism, like modernism, reflects the break-up of cultural and religious authority, the turn away from any simple or stable definition of truth, the shift from totalizing systems and unified narratives to a more fragmented plurality of perspectives” (Dickstein, 1998, 4). Yet diversity without purpose can result in cacophony. Thus, on the other hand, the absence of foundational stances, for example, the reality of racism within anti-racist projects, or of patriarchy within feminist scholarship, or capitalist exploitation within Marxist social thought, can maroon pragmatism as a rudderless knowledge project.
making theoretical claims about the social world. Pragmatism’s commitment to experimentalism stems from the goal of retaining its objectivity as a science, yet a science that can be used to shape the social world. As Dickstein points out: “working from a scientific model like the one later developed by Thomas Kuhn, Dewey envisioned a self-correcting community of enquirers who would proceed experimentally according to fallibilistic norms of ‘warranted assertability,’ instead of claiming to discover timeless truths that corresponded to the way the world actually is” (Dickstein, 1998, 6). Thus, pragmatism can be seen as a malleable set of tools that can be used for a variety of purposes.

Much issue can be taken with my rendition of American pragmatism’s orienting principles, but for now, I want to examine how these points articulate with the contemporary period of revitalization that pragmatism shares with intersectionality. The revitalization of contemporary discourse on pragmatism operates in three interrelated sites, namely, efforts to (1) flesh out omissions or holes in the discourse, primarily by including thinkers and works that have been excluded; (2) revise the narrative to correct for existing bias and/or explicate existing themes; and (3) replace the standard narrative with one that more accurately explains the field in light of contemporary realities. The tension linking sites two and three, revising as compared to replacing the prevailing narrative, resembles the process moving from reform to transformation of the discourse. In a Kuhnian sense, a paradigm shift occurs when the old narratives of the structural and symbolic boundaries of American pragmatism no longer work, requiring something new (Kuhn, 1970). Here I present a preliminary discussion of this shift from reform to transformation within pragmatism, searching for themes that may have the greatest resonance with intersectionality

One form of contemporary revitalization lies in efforts to revise or reform prevailing narratives of American pragmatism so that they more accurately reflect the field. Efforts at

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11 Because American pragmatism writ large did undergo a period of quiescence, fleshing out this discourse takes the form of raising awareness of pragmatism itself, as well as its themes and practitioners. Revitalization aims to make the ideas of pragmatists available to contemporary readers. The publication of several edited volumes that aim to identify the major works of major pragmatist thinkers seems designed to flesh out the works of thinkers who already are legitimated pragmatist thinkers. Works in this tradition include Louis Menand’s Pragmatism: A Reader (Menand, 1997); Susan Haack’s Pragmatism, Old and New (Haack, 2006); and John J. Stuhr’s Pragmatism and Classical American Philosophy (Stuhr, 2000). Each of these anthologies has a different focus, which accounts in part, for the differing individuals who are identified as being major figures that can be included in anthologies.

Book length monographs illustrate another mechanism for aiming to map the structural and symbolic contours of American pragmatism as a knowledge project. A sampling of recent volumes illustrates the different approaches and areas of emphasis presented by thinkers who aim to synthesize the main ideas of the field and/or explore its trajectory. Louis Menand’s The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America is a work of fiction written for a general audience, yet this volume also serves as a solid introduction to the core ideas of Menand’s analysis of the founders of the field. Menand’s work links ideas of pragmatism to a distinctly American setting. (Menand, 2001).

Because prevailing narratives of pragmatism position it within philosophy as a discipline, several monographs map its trajectory within this field. For example, Cornelis De Waal’s On Pragmatism (De Waal, 2005) provides a solid summary of main ideas and history for philosophy students. Hans Joas’s Pragmatism and Social Theory (Joas, 1993) emphasizes expressions of pragmatism in the U.S. and Europe. Cornel West’s volume The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism (West, 1989), aims to broaden the pragmatist canon to include themes and thinkers that routinely did not appear in histories. Focusing on pragmatism as a sub-field of philosophy, West aimed to show pragmatism’s potential utility for a more democratic agenda. Scott L. Pratt engages in a similar project. In Native Pragmatism: Rethinking the Roots of American Philosophy (Pratt, 2002) Pratt also examines the connections between pragmatism and philosophy, yet casts a much wider net than West and others by his incorporation of the encounter between native peoples and settlers as core (Pratt 2002). Still within this tradition of linking pragmatism within the confines of philosophy specifically and social theory in general, Larry A. Hickman’s Pragmatism as Post-Postmodernism: Lessons from John Dewey examines the provocative thesis that pragmatism may constitute the next step after post-structuralism (Hickman, 2007). This is yet another expression of revival.
revising the canon often begin with trying to reclaim neglected or overlooked figures such as C. Wright Mills. For example, C. Wright Mills is an important pragmatist thinker who wrote his doctoral dissertation on pragmatism and who popularized the ideas of American pragmatism through his public sociology. Mills’ groundbreaking volume, *The Sociological Imagination*, to this day remains one of the most widely read works in sociology (Mills, 2000). Despite the fact that *The Sociological Imagination* encompasses many of the orientations of pragmatism discussed above, and that Mills’ ideas had an important effect on actual social conditions, Mills is rarely included in anthologies on pragmatism. Including Mills within pragmatism raises the question of how the canon might be different had Mills’s pragmatism been included. Despite the fact that Mills constitutes an important figure that stands at the crossroads of pragmatism, phenomenology and American sociology (Gross, 2007), he has had few advocates within philosophy, the discipline with the strongest claim on pragmatism.

Within philosophy, the academic discipline that manages the structural and symbolic boundaries of American pragmatism, revitalization has taken the form of reclaiming neglected or overlooked figures with closer ties to philosophy than Mills. In part, this revitalization has reflected late-twentieth century societal trends. Just as race, gender, sexuality and other categories of analysis have become visible within the academy as well as broader society, so too have these same categories been part of efforts to revise the pragmatist canon. Take gender for example. Charlene Seigfried’s chapter “Reclaiming a Heritage: Women Pragmatists” in *Pragmatism and Feminism* examines the work of women philosophers who drew upon pragmatist ideas (Seigfried, 1996, 40-66). Jane Addams constitutes an important pragmatist thinker whose work has been relegated to the applied area of social work. Yet in part due to her close association with John Dewey and as a writer in her own regard, see, e.g., (Addams, 2002), incorporating Addams into the pragmatist canon within philosophy by definition challenges the boundaries of what counts as pragmatism.

Much of this work on women philosophers and on feminism and pragmatism aims to reform the pragmatist canon to take gender into account. Several works stand out in this endeavor, among them, Charlene Seigfried’s “Shared Communities of Interest: Feminism and Pragmatism” (Seigfried, 1993, 1996); and Shannon Sullivan’s analysis of the intersections of pragmatist and continental feminisms (Sullivan, 2002). These efforts to examine the relationship between gendered analyses, which may or may not be feminist, and pragmatism provide a space for new avenues of investigation. For example, Shannon Sullivan revisits John Dewey’s pragmatism with an eye toward reconfiguring gender (Sullivan, 2000). Similarly, Mark Wood examines the implications that more closely aligning feminist standpoint epistemology with pragmatism might have for understandings of democracy (Wood, forthcoming).

Scholars of race and ethnicity have engaged in a similar process of reclaiming intellectuals for the pragmatist tradition, with an eye toward reforming it. William E.B. Du Bois seems the obvious choice here, primarily because Du Bois has recognition across so many fields. Thus, part of canon-revision has centered on investigating Du Bois’s relationship to American pragmatism, for example, Cornel West’s analysis of Du Bois as a “Jamesian Organic Intellectual” (West, 1989, 138-149), or Ross Posnock’s analysis of Du Bois’s pragmatism and its lineage (Posnock, 1998).

The focus on Du Bois is important, yet growing interest in the works of Alain Locke, an equally if not more significant figure for philosophy, illustrates the importance of incorporating neglected figures with an eye toward reforming the pragmatist canon (Fraser, 1998; Harris, 1999). As a philosopher who received his training at Harvard University under Wil-
liam James, Locke was centrally located in relation to classical American pragmatism. Both Fraser and Harris point to Locke’s work (see, especially *Race Contacts and Interracial Relations* (Locke, 1992)), as expressing a “critical pragmatism” that not only advanced understandings of race that foreshadow the contemporary period, but that also had significant implications for pragmatism’s orientation to power and domination. As Fraser contends:

Many commentators have noted the overly integrative and idealist character of the social thought of the classical pragmatists. Their many important insights notwithstanding, John Dewey, George Herbert Mead, Jane Addams, and W.I. Thomas are widely seen as having failed to give adequate weight to the ‘hard facts’ of power and domination in social life. Assuming the inevitable unfolding of an increasingly integrated world civilization, and emphasizing culture at the expense of political economy, they tended at times to posit imaginary, holistic ‘solutions’ to difficult, sometimes irreconcilable social conflicts. Yet Locke’s 1916 lectures provide a glimpse of another pragmatism. Because he was theorizing about ‘race’ and racism, he linked cultural issues directly to the problem of inequality; and he stressed the centrality of power to the regulation of group differences in the United States. Thus, in contrast to the mainstream pragmatists of the World War I period, Locke pioneered an approach to social theory that took domination seriously (Fraser, 1998, 158-159).

Incorporating Locke’s analysis of race and racism refocuses attention on issues of power and domination, an area that might have fostered a very different “classical” pragmatism.

At some point, reform gives way to paradigm shifts of transformation, typically through the recognition of the implicit limitations of reform. The process of reclaiming ostensibly lost figures such as Locke and using this reclamation to engage in a re-reading or revision of the pragmatist canon over time, both reformist projects, hits a tipping point where the stock story of pragmatism cannot be simply fleshed out or revised. Contemporary revitalization of American pragmatism may require replacing the legitimated figures and currently agreed upon dimensions of pragmatist thought with narratives more compelling analyses for what now falls under the umbrella of American pragmatism. How would the genealogy of American pragmatism be altered by starting with a different set of thinkers, for example, with Anna Julia Cooper, Ida Wells-Barnett, or William E. B. Du Bois; or with the assumption that major pragmatist thinkers, like Mills, are often found outside the discipline of philosophy? How might our understanding of classical pragmatism be altered by placing Alain Locke in the pantheon of pragmatism’s founding fathers? How would the works of Peirce, James and Dewey be included into a canon that initially excluded them? What alternative genealogies of American pragmatism exist? How would we write them?

Scott Pratt’s volume, *Native Pragmatism: Rethinking the Roots of American Philosophy*, identifies a novel point of origin for American pragmatism, one that enables him to build a genealogy on the interactions among native peoples and major figures of American philosophy (Pratt, 2002). Scott explores how pragmatism was not simply a method or set of tools, but rather how its contours reflected the response by its practitioners to the challenges they faced. Focusing on the “Americaness” of American pragmatism, Scott argues that one of the major themes of American national identity has been the ways in which heterogeneous populations, especially those of race and ethnicity, have interacted to shape all dimen-
sions of America. Scott’s radical genealogy suggests that pragmatism is “not only a critical perspective but one that tries to respond to the problems faced by those who find themselves in a place where racially different peoples meet and seek to coexist” (Pratt, 2002, xii). It stands to reason that this major theme of American life would lie at the core of American pragmatism as a distinctly American philosophy, no matter how diligently later versions aim to decontextualize its particular roots. Scott’s volume carefully develops three main premises: (1) the central commitments that characterize the classical pragmatism of Charles S. Peirce, William James and John Dewey are apparent much earlier in Native American thought; (2) cases exist throughout the seventeenth, eighteenth and into the nineteenth centuries that suggest Native American thought influenced European American thinkers; and (3) this more robust social, intellectual and political context out of which classical pragmatism emerged suggests that pragmatism was not simply a further development of modern European thought faced with the conditions of a “wilderness” (Pratt, 2002, xii). Thus, recontextualizing pragmatism’s emphasis on transactions within struggles to build communities among people with very different backgrounds on the level of local communities through the nation-building activities of America itself provides a deeper reading of American pragmatism.

Scholars of gender, race and ethnicity may be at the forefront of efforts to revitalize American pragmatism, yet the challenge of transforming American pragmatism goes beyond these sites of contestation. In the opening pages of her book Pragmatism and Feminism, Charlene Seigfried identifies the need to move beyond the legitimated genealogy: “I ... begin by defining as pragmatism the positions developed by the members of the historically recognized movement of American pragmatism. But this is only a beginning meant to be left behind. One problem that immediately arises is that many writers defining the movement have focused almost exclusively on the pragmatic method and pragmatic theories of meaning and truth and have drawn their inferences from articles and books specifically addressed to this cluster of issues” (Seigfried, 1996, 5). Themes such as how social inequalities of race, class and gender shape experiences, the centrality of power to participatory democracy, and ethical issues raised by social justice agendas might have been more centrally located within the pragmatist canon had the work by “members of the historically recognized movement of American pragmatism” not been defined as coterminous with pragmatism itself. Thus, had Alain Locke’s “critical pragmatism” and Black women’s “visionary pragmatism” been incorporated earlier, American pragmatism itself might have been quite different.

Intersectionality and American Pragmatism in Dialogue

Despite their differences, developing genealogies for intersectionality and American pragmatism remain under construction. Intersectionality appears to be establishing itself as a legitimated academic discourse, yet defining it too narrowly as a late-twentieth-century academic discourse may foster premature canonical closure. In contrast, American pragmatism already has canonical status, yet finds itself revisiting its core ideas in light of challenges to its self-presentation advanced by scholars of gender and race among others. In this fluid interpretive context, placing intersectionality’s and American pragmatism’s orienting themes in dialogue may create space for some provocative transformative possibilities for both knowledge projects.

This paper set out to explore one core question: how might intersectionality and American pragmatism as knowledge projects inform each other? Many potential and actual points
of contact between intersectionality and American pragmatism as knowledge projects exist, yet three areas seem especially germane for both projects, namely, experience, inequality and action.

**Experience**

Intersectionality needs to develop a robust analysis of the importance of experience to its project and American pragmatism might provide the tools for such an analysis. Recall that Black women and Latinas used their experiences within race, class, gender and sexuality as mutually constructing systems of power to develop arguments about the centrality of intersectionality. Their experiences led them to analyze their specific social location within intersecting systems of oppression, a grounding that in turn fostered analyses of oppression itself that transcended any one individual’s or any one group’s experiences. Experience and speaking from the truth of one’s own reality constituted an important dimension of Black feminism and its links to standpoint epistemology (Collins, 1998, 201-268). In contrast, white men typically do not use their experiences in this way in doing intellectual work, such that the erasure of the social location of the intellectual becomes a signature feature of Western social theory, including pragmatism.

This emphasis on the validity of experience has been a major criticism of intersectionality. Within Black feminism and race/class/gender studies, the slogan the “personal is political” invoked a notion of a social self that was grounded in particular social contexts that in turn were shaped by intersecting power relations. The “personal” became “political” via a consciousness raising process of seeing how personal experiences were shaped by and shaped broader political phenomena. Yet the incorporation of intersectionality into the academy has seemingly stripped the personal of these political connotations, leaving an individual self bereft of social context. What’s left seems to be an academic discourse that is increasingly characterized by an inordinate focus on how individuals construct their individual identities. Yet this emphasis on the ways that individuals perform or “do” race or gender identities, for example, elides the much broader question of why spend so much time on individual identity at all. A particular kind of personal has changed the meaning of the political in ways that highlight some aspects of the political, namely, individual choice and internal subjectivities, while erasing others, namely, structural systems of power. Intersectionality’s grounding in narrative traditions raises special challenges for its practitioners who wish to refocus on the social, especially a social as organized via intersecting systems of power.

Eschewing “identity politics” not only severs identity from politics, it simultaneously redefines experience as only valid within an interpretive framework of individual experience. More significantly, this containment of experience to individuals minimizes the significance of group-based experience. Group-based experience, and the interpretive perspective of a group of individuals with shared experiences, can only be expressed through community as a structural entity. In this sense, community is a dynamic of expression of intersecting power relations (Collins, 2010). Intersectionality as a field of study initially incorporated

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13 It is beyond the scope of this paper to develop these ideas beyond a cursory summary. However, several ways in which these and other themes might be related provide a provocative anchor for piecing together a dialogical space for intersectionality and pragmatism. Such dialogues can be synergistic (e.g., areas of emphasis in one overlap with those of the other area such that they have influenced one another); complementary (e.g., areas of emphasis in one fit together with areas of neglect in the other); conflicting (e.g., they move in different directions regarding some entity); and/ or unrelated (e.g., there may be elements of one that are simply not relevant to the overall aspirations of the other knowledge project).
these more robust understandings of experience, yet criticism of identity politics through this narrowing lens undercuts this dimension of intersectionality.

American pragmatism potentially becomes quite useful here, for it provides an alternative analysis of experience than that of dominant scientific discourse. When it comes to the theme of experience, intersectionality and pragmatism exhibit similarities that link their understandings of the individual in the context of community. Take, for example, Stuhr’s description of pragmatism’s emphasis on the centrality of experience for intersubjective understandings:

They [James & Dewey] insist that experience is an active, ongoing affair in which experiencing subject and experienced object constitute a primal, integral, relational unity. Experience is not an interaction of separate subject and object, a point of connection between a subjective realm of the experiencer and the objective order of nature. Instead, experience is existentially inclusive, continuous, unified: it is that interaction of subject and object which constitutes subject and object – as partial features of this active, yet unanalyzed totality. Experience, then, is not an ‘interaction’ but a ‘transaction’ in which the whole constitutes its interrelated aspects (Stuhr, 2000, 4-5).

Thus, American pragmatism’s notion of the social self, of transactional processes, and of social groups potentially provides an important analysis that can contest current challenges to intersectionality’s reliance on experience.

Despite these potential contributions, intersectional projects might do well to keep these distinctions between individual and group in mind when assessing American pragmatism’s approach to social change. Discussing American pragmatism within early twentieth century America, Cornel West casts a careful eye on pragmatism’s position on reform and transformation, one with considerable implications for race, class and gender. West notes: “It promotes basic transformation at the level of the individual; for society, it supports slow gradual change. It encourages incessant transgression at the level of the individual; for society it heralds reconciliation and mediation. Last, it extols the heroic energies of willful action at the level of the individual; for society, it fosters judicious and dispassionate judgments of limits and constraints” (West, 1989, 62). Despite having a robust analysis of experience that might plug some holes in intersectional discourse, as the aforementioned critics of its incorporation of race and gender as systems of inequality point out, American pragmatism has routinely overlooked some fundamental forms of experience in its own social context that shape its own functioning.

Infusing intersectionality with a pragmatist ethos regarding experience realigns contemporary configurations of intersectionality as an academic discourse with social movement approaches to race/class/gender/sexuality that advanced more robust analyses of experience, inequality, individuality and community. Rather than accepting a notion of experience as data for a more general theory, or as some sort of essentialized category that one possesses, or worse yet, identifying one group’s experience as universal, normative and/or ideal, an intersectional analysis suggests that experience grounds different standpoints, providing each member of a common project a partial perspective. Individual and group-based experiences become the stuff of transactions, not something to be swept under the rug. Redefining the personal reshapes the political and redefining the political reorients the personal.

When it comes to experiences, American pragmatism also has much to learn from intersectionality. Putting power and the political back into American pragmatism means seeing the individual as an important site of politics within a community that itself is conceptua-
lized as organized around power relations. Redefining the construct of community might be useful for grappling with the “changing-same” patterns of social inequalities that characterize intersecting power relations of race, class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, age, ability, and nation. Because the construct of community constitutes both a principle of actual social organization and an idea that people use to make sense of and shape their everyday lived realities, it may be central to the workings of intersecting power relations in heretofore unrecognized ways. Recasting the notion of community as a political construct highlights how social inequalities are organized via structural principles of community and are made comprehensible through a language of community (Collins, 2010).

Complex Social Inequalities

A second area of convergence where a dialogue between intersectionality and American pragmatism might be useful concerns their respective treatments of complex social inequalities. Intersectionality stresses complex social inequalities as central to its discourse. In contrast, Alain Locke’s critical pragmatism that took power and culture into account never rose to prominence within the classical pragmatist canon. As a result, American pragmatism has matured within a context where social inequalities were quite visible to its practitioners, for example, the prominence of eugenics; yet understanding and/or challenging complex social inequalities has not been explicitly part of the pragmatist canon. Pragmatism is far more developed as a canon than intersectionality, yet when it comes to the theme of complex social inequalities, or inequality at all, it has far less to say.

Standard narratives that trace the emergence and development of American pragmatism seemingly have no place for complex social inequalities. It’s as if pragmatism remained unaffected by racism, sexism, heterosexism, class exploitation and nationalism shaping late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century America. Instead, pragmatism, like Western knowledge projects in general, bracketed these systems of power out of knowledge construction except at topics of investigation. Analyses of ostensibly universalistic themes such as democracy, community, science, enlightenment, fairness were elevated over the seemingly particularistic expressions of these ideals within societies characterized by particular inequalities.

American pragmatism’s early silence about social inequality is even more noteworthy given its embeddedness in turn-of-the-century social relations that were shaped by progressivism. Maintaining a split between theory and practice in its own practice (despite its theoretical content that eschewed such splits), enabled pragmatism to emerge as a discourse that could be applied to social inequalities, but one that at the same time, need say little about those inequalities as explanatory processes. Rather, the typical approach to social inequality within pragmatism has been to conceptualize social inequality as a topic or theme for empirical investigation with no inherent connection to symbolic or structural contours of American pragmatism itself.

Despite American pragmatism’s seeming silences about social inequality, this discourse has important implications for understanding complex social inequalities. Catalyzed by addressing the social inequalities and attendant social problems associated with gender and race as systems of power, pragmatism’s potential contributions to examining other systems of power, such as ethnicity have also been studied (Medina, 2004). Moving to place the ideas of American pragmatism in dialogue with racial theory or feminist theory represents a step along this same path. Here the work of pragmatists who work directly with both traditions, for example, pragmatism and gender, or pragmatism and race, are positioned not
simply to apply the ideas of pragmatism to contemporary social issues, but rather to push the boundaries of pragmatism in ways that test its validity as a critical social theory. These efforts by feminists and critical race scholars to place pragmatism in dialogue with analyses of gender and race collectively point to how the stock story of pragmatism becomes altered when these issues are considered. Yet these are mono-issues, either gender or race or ethnicity that eschew yet are moving toward the intersectionality of complex social inequalities. Stated differently, the contemporary revitalization of American pragmatism with its attendant efforts to flesh out, revise and/or replace the prevailing stock story place American pragmatism on a trajectory that points it toward intersectionality.

When it comes to the treatment of complex social inequalities within American pragmatism, two themes stand out. For one, individual figures within a broader pragmatist movement may have developed analyses of one form of social inequality, race or gender, or class, but American pragmatism overall did not explicitly concern itself with social inequality as part of its method. This is especially ironic, given the prevalence of eugenics as a clearly intersectional scientific discourse during American pragmatism’s rise, with its clear attention to race, class, gender, sexuality and ethnicity as interconnected (see, e.g. Galton, 1904). This was the interpretive context against which American pragmatism defined itself as a science, yet the theme of social inequality was as taken for granted by pragmatists as it was a major preoccupation of eugenicists.

For another, the lack of attention to social inequality as a pillar of pragmatism meant that a more sophisticated analysis of social inequality, e.g., one informed by intersectional analyses of systems of power, was not forthcoming during its moment of ascendency in the late nineteenth, early twentieth century. American pragmatism had important implications for inequality, yet as a method or tool that could be put to a variety of purposes: “for progressive thinkers it meant that the sources of social inequality, far from being a given, could be traced empirically and altered by changes in education and public policy” (Dickstein, 1998, 4). In another irony, the very tenets of pragmatism concerning social context and its emphasis on transactional analyses suggests that efforts to view any discourse as a decontextualized methodology suspect. Rather, American pragmatism chose to see certain aspects of social reality as being amenable to so-called melioration and others as taken-for-granted essentials.

Thus, the treatment of social inequality within American pragmatism points to the ironies that permeate this discourse. This can be explained in part by its status as a theory of method or as a method rather than as a theory of society (one characterized by inequality). Thus, one of the more significant contributions of intersectionality may lie in its ability to develop a more robust understanding of complex social inequalities that can be used to animate existing initiatives within American pragmatism. Understanding complex social inequalities lies at the heart of intersectionality’s symbolic and structural contours. Might inequality become another master category within American pragmatism? This is an area for future dialogue and development.

**Social Action**

Pragmatism and intersectionality have another point of contact where a dialogue might be beneficial. Both discourses emphasize social action, and their respective approaches might inform one another. Pragmatism’s theory of action emphasizes human action in the social world whereby knowledge itself reflects human beings’ actions. As social phenomena, identities are never finished but are always in the making via human engagement with
the social world. Similarly, knowledge or “truths” are not absolute, and must be evaluated by how well they function (their pragmatic value). By viewing the social world as always in the making and malleable and placing social actors in this world as thinking beings who bring science or “intelligent thought” to the process of making the world, pragmatism creates space to valorize human creativity and agency. This robust understanding of human action as situated at the intersection of ideas and practice is vital in meeting contemporary challenges. For example, John Dewey’s conception of an educated public that might act in the best interests of the group relies on individuals whose “intelligent thought” brings the best ideas to the table for participatory democracy (Dewey, 1954).

In discussing the significance of pragmatism for contemporary social theory, German theorist Hans Joas identifies one conundrum that lies at the heart of American pragmatism that affects both perceptions of it as well as its orientation as a theory of action: “It is my contention that American pragmatism is characterized by its understanding of human action as creative action. The understanding of creativity contained in pragmatism is specific in the sense that pragmatism focuses on the fact that creativity is always embedded in a situation, i.e., on the human being’s ‘situated freedom’” (Joas, 1993, 4). Joas’s description aptly describes exactly what Black women and Latinas and many others did during the social movement phase that catalyzed the emergence of intersectionality. The conundrum for American pragmatism lies in its desire to examine human creativity without unduly embedding itself in actual situations that have varying degrees of “situated freedoms”. The Americaness of American pragmatism comes into play here, in that freedom has historically been refracted through power relations of race, class, gender and sexuality.

Despite pragmatism’s potential, its actual approach to social action has been shaped by the broader social context in which pragmatist thinkers as social actors have been situated and which they aim to shape. As a theory of action, pragmatism’s emphasis on maintaining social order with its concomitant ideas of incremental change and reformism reflects the social locations of its founding fathers and their subsequent practitioners. Hans Joas explains this connection between pragmatism’s approach to action and its corresponding emphasis on social order: “Pragmatism is a philosophy of action … It does not, however, attack utilitarianism over the problem of action and social order, but over the problem of action and consciousness. Pragmatism developed the concept of action in order to overcome the Cartesian dualisms … Pragmatism’s theory of social order, then, is guided by a conception of social control in the sense of collective self-regulation and problem-solving” (Joas, 1993, 18). This approach to action and social order enables pragmatism to imagine that the structure of communication within communities of scientists, in other words, the “intelligent thought” required to participate in informed dialogue, should serve as the model for communities and democratic institutions.

Despite its provocative ideas about social action that might work in theory, pragmatism remains limited as a theory of social action, primarily because it underemphasizes the significance of power in shaping social action. Ignoring power relations, specifically those of class, race and gender that have been so prominent in the American setting, leaves pragmatism adrift. Without some sort of guiding principles to help people place value on ideas — for

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14 Joas also points out that this dimension of American pragmatism has garnered criticism: “It is precisely this emphasis on the interconnection of creativity and situation that has given rise to the repeated charge that pragmatists merely possess a theory that is a philosophy of adaptation to given circumstances. This accusation fails to perceive the antideterministic thrust of the pragmatists. In their view the actors confront problems whether they want to or not; the solution to these problems, however, is not clearly prescribed beforehand by reality, but calls for creativity and brings something objectively new into the world” (Joas, 1993, 4).
example, racism, sexism and class exploitation are socially unjust and their continuation harms democratic processes – dialogues can continue on in infinite loops of communicative understandings that lack any overarching social meaning. Action is not guided simply by rationality, by considering all the options, acting, and then folding new knowledge back into a feedback loop of recursive understanding. American pragmatism remains inherently reactive to social conditions because it does not adhere to a program of what it wants to do. Pragmatism’s versatility enhances its capacity for action, yet its failure to embrace any guiding principles as central to the symbolic contours of its discourse means that it tools can used for a variety of ends. This stance makes American pragmatism not fatally flawed, but rather incomplete.

As a knowledge project, intersectionality’s understanding of social action, that knowing and doing remain intertwined in the context of specific political projects, frames its understanding of action. Here the visionary pragmatism as expressed by African American women engaged in early-twentieth-century social movements provides a model for thinking about agency, community and social change that seems directly influenced by pragmatism, but is less often recognized as such. The theme of Black women’s visionary pragmatism is part of this tradition (Collins, 2009, 175-183; James & Busia, 1993). Two elements of visionary pragmatism are especially significant. On the one hand, people who embrace visionary pragmatism believe in taking principled stances to guide behavior. Visionary pragmatism consists of choosing to commit to principles that can be used to guide human action. For example, for African American women social justice has been a core principle that has simultaneously grounded Black feminism yet provided a set of ideas to guide behavior (Collins, 1998). African American women believe that racism and sexism are morally bad and these beliefs simultaneously shape behavior and are shaped by Black women’s actions. On the other hand, people who embrace visionary pragmatism do not live lives organized solely by abstract principles. Instead, they make pragmatic choices in specific social contexts, thus embracing a more robust understanding of the pragmatic than simple practicality. For example, African Americans’ “situated creativity” or, in the words of historian Robin D. G. Kelley, their “radical imagination” concerning Black freedom struggle has been honed through this recursive process of always testing ideas in the crucible of experience (Kelley, 2002). Visionary pragmatism combines both of these elements of having a broader vision of why engage in social action in the first place, and being equipped with functional tools that enable people to advance that vision in varying social locations. Stated differently, pragmatic choices reflect the principled stances that people take in response to the constraints and opportunities associated with specific social contexts.

Black women’s visionary pragmatism has long expressed this creative tension between the desirable, the possible, the probable and the practical. With each iteration of a particular vision, or of ever-changing particular ways of experiencing the world, everyday life is something that is rooted, grounded, contingent, dynamic, and holistic. It is characterized by infinite opportunities to engage in critical analysis and take action. In everyday life, principles give life meaning and actions make it meaningful. It matters which particular prin-

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15 Here I make a distinction between principles and ideology, theology or dogma. Principles are core ideas that will never be actually realized but that will always be tested in each new social formation. For example, taking action against color-conscious racism fostered the noble ethos of colorblindness. Yet the very principle of colorblindness was tested through the emergence of colorblind racism, a seeming oxymoron. Unless one can imagine a world where all vestiges of a 500-year systems of global racism are eradicated, there will always be the need to take action against racism.
ciples one stands for. Depending on what kind of social context you are in, you have the opportunity if not the responsibility of seeing how specific principles manifest themselves.

My concern is that this robust version of social action encapsulated by visionary pragmatism is rapidly disappearing in response to intersectionality’s legitimation within the academy. Shorn of its connection to visionary pragmatism, or, as discussed earlier, to more robust understandings of individual and group-based experience and a lived understanding of complex social inequalities, intersectionality is fast becoming just another theory of truth that can be manipulated for a variety of ends. In this regard, intersectionality in the academy remains unfinished in that it claims part of the broader corpus of work that catalyzed it, yet it leaves the ethical and political dimensions of social movement politics behind as being non-scholarly and too activist. Yet what is a theory of action that cannot explain its own “action” strategies? Its own culpability in shaping the world around it?

As theories of action situated within complex power relations, intersectionality and American pragmatism both must attend to the kinds of experiences they sanction and censure. Moreover, as future-oriented knowledge projects, both necessarily build upon the past, yet neither need remain there. The brief genealogies of intersectionality and American pragmatism presented here were meant to summarize each discourse in order to unsettle it. My goal has been to provide useful for insights for paths not taken within each discourse, with an eye toward continual revision of what counts as the legitimated canon of each area. Moving forward has required looking back. The real challenge for intersectionality and American pragmatism lies in continuing this stance of internal and external interrogation, recognizing that remaining unfinished may be the essential skill needed for the future.

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Bill E. Lawson

Of President Barack H. Obama and Others: Public Policy, Race-talk, and Pragmatism

Abstract. The election of Barack H. Obama as President of the United States was a significant event in the social and political history of the United States. His election as the first non-white male President has been seen as a sign of the changing racial attitudes of white Americans. Nonetheless, the specter of race and racism haunts his presidency. As the first African American president, he has to show the black community that he has their social, political, and economic interests on his public policy agenda. On the other hand, he cannot appear to be too overtly pro-black without bruising white racial sensibilities. In order to walk this fine line, President Obama has taken a colorblind approach to public policies. He claims that his color-blind public policies will help to uplift all citizens regardless of race, creed, or national origin. Important for this discussion is the claim that race need not be a factor in public policies. There are some doubts about this claim given the history of anti-black racism in the United States. It is argued, herein, that color or race conscious policies are needed to address some of the social and economic problems that besiege the black community. This article utilizes a pragmatic account of race to illustrate why colorblindness in public policies takes an ahistorical and decontextualized view of race and in the long term will hurt the social and economic standing of African Americans in the move to a more perfect union.

“Souls” Revisited

In 1903, W. E. B. Dubois published his seminal work, The Souls of Black Folk, which contained his scathing critique of Booker T. Washington entitled “Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others.” In this critique, Dubois took issue with what he took to be the program of racial reconciliation that Washington proposed. Dubois claimed that Washington’s program for the betterment of race relations in the United States was having a detrimental effect on the educational progress and social standing of black people. He claimed that the effects of Washington’s program had negative consequences, in that it asked that black people give up, at least for the present, three things:

First, political power, Second, insistence on civil rights, Third, higher education of Negro youth, and concentrate all their energies on industrial education, the accumulation of wealth, and the conciliation of the South. This policy has been courageously and insistently advocated for over fifteen years, and has been triumphant for perhaps ten years. As a result of this tender of the palm-branch, what has been the return? In these years there have occurred:

The disfranchisement of the Negro.

The legal creation of a distinct status of civil inferiority for the Negro.

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1 I want to acknowledge the support of the Department of Philosophy at the University of Liverpool, particularly Gillian Howie, Simone Hailwood, and Stephen McLeod. A very special thanks to Dr. Fionnghuala Sweeney, Dionne Palmer, and Dr. Renée Sanders-Lawson.

The steady withdrawal of aid from institutions for the higher training of the Negro.

According to Dubois, Blacks must forthrightly push and demand the status of full citizenship, equal educational opportunities, and full participation in the political process. To do less, according to Dubois, was to deny the very humanity of blacks. I disagree that Washington’s program had the negative impact that Dubois accused it of having on the lives of black people, but that is the topic of another paper. While there is debate about the veracity of Dubois’s critique, it made a lasting impression on millions of readers of Souls. His critique reminds us to be vigilant in our assessment of programs purportedly meant to help the black community and all Americans.

In the one hundred and twenty-five years between the publishing of Souls and the election of President Obama, there have been many changes in the manner in which race and racism impact on the lives of African Americans, so much so that there are persons who now claim that the United States is in a “post-racial” state. The claim is that race and racism are no longer significant factors in the success of any person who wants to succeed. The claim is not that there is no longer individual acts of racism, but that societal racism has diminished to the point where race no longer matters. In the United States, at least, character has finally overcome color. The election of a non-white male as President of the United States attests to this important social fact. It is thought by some that the election of Obama shows how far the country has come in thinking about race relations. However, all of the economic indicators show that African Americans are still doing much worse, educationally, financially, and in terms of life expectancy, than whites, despite their extensive sojourn in the United States. President Obama realizes this important fact about black life in America. He has consistently proclaimed that his public policies will help the economic and social standing of blacks. Will his public policies really be effective in advancing the economic and social standing of black Americans?

One hundred and twenty-five years after the publication of Souls, I want to use a similar Duboisian critique of President Obama’s programs of social and economic progress that, by his account, are meant to advance the social and political position of all Americans. The claim here is that his universalist approach to policy-making and implementation will have a detrimental impact on the social and economic standing of African Americans. It is his use of color-blindness as a guiding principle to direct public policies that is called into question. Will this approach address the social ills that have continually plagued the African American community? I think not. I also think that a pragmatic understanding of race-talk can help us understand why colorblind policies will not work to address the social and economic problems facing the black community. It is argued, herein, that color or race conscious policies are needed to address the social and economic problems that besiege the black community. This article will utilize a pragmatic account of race to illustrate why colorblindness in public policies takes an ahistorical and decontextualized view of race and in the long term will hurt the social and economic standing of African Americans, indeed all Americans.

In a manner similar to that of Dubois, I want to examine the logic of President Obama’s position on colorblindness in public policies for the advancement of African Americans. At the outset, I want to claim that there are some interesting similarities between the lives of

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3 “Souls”.
6 See, for example, Sundquist, 2009.
Obama and Washington. Obama came to the attention of the nation in the same manner as Washington: Washington’s fame and prominence came after his 1895 Atlanta Exposition Address⁷, and Obama’s national fame came after his keynote address at the 2004 Democratic National Convention⁸. These speeches thrust both men into the public limelight and within a few years Washington was seen as the leader of black America and Obama was President of the United States. Let me be clear here, I am not equating any of Obama’s political positions with those of Washington. These men come onto the political scene at radically different political moments in the history of the United States. Nonetheless the economic, social, and political plight of many African Americans remains just as dire now as it was then⁹. Washington and Obama both had to deal with issues of the problematic condition of black Americans. Obama notes correctly that the economic situation in the United States has been bad for all Americans. While it is true that Americans across the racial divide have been hit hard by the economic turn down, the African-American Community has been one of the hardest hit. The problems facing the African-American community have their roots in the racist history of the United States, and in the recurrent failure of the United States to address these problems connected with this history. Indeed this may be the most important difference between Obama and Washington. Washington understood the failure of the United States to fully incorporate African Americans into the social, economic, and political life of the country¹⁰. Obama seems to think that the country has or is moving much closer too making the full inclusion of African Americans a social reality. This is the point at issue. While no one would claim that there has been no progress, there are questions as to whether the progress is only symbolic¹¹. 

While there was much excitement generated by his campaign, there is a suspicion that his policy-making after his election marks a setback for the full inclusion of African Americans into the social fabric of the United States. Obama, during his campaign and after, has consistently adhered to the view that making the lives of all Americans better will solve many of the problems of black Americans. For this reason, public policies should be color-blind. There is some truth to the claim that if all Americans do well, so will African Americans. But it seems also true that many of the problems-social, economic, and political—require “race conscious” policies. These are policies that are directed to the problems that plague the African-American community given the racist history and current instances of racism in the United States. I will cite some particular problems later in the paper. 

In the United States, racism has impacted on the manner in which social goods have been distributed. For decades there were race conscious policies that favored whites over blacks. For years, persons of color were the victims of unjust social goods distribution policies. Policies such as Affirmative Action and “busing” were meant to address the maldistribution of social goods in the economic and educational spheres of life and the ways in which these inequities affected the lives of many African Americans. A race or at least a color conscious policy was needed to ensure that blacks were not again victimized by the

maldistribution of social goods. In this regard, race becomes a factor in our understanding of the (re) distribution of social goods to correct for past injustices. These are called race or color conscious principles. These color and/or race conscious policies came under and still are attacked for being unfair and unjust. It was claimed that social justice required principles that were color-blind, that is, it was and remains wrong to use race or color as a principle for the distribution of social goods. Social justice requires race neutral policies for the distribution of social goods.

On the other hand, there are persons who believe that the racial climate in the United States has changed so drastically that the race of a person is insignificant in determining his or her success. Indeed persons, both black and white, think that race is no longer the dominant factor in the success or failure of persons of color. Their economic and social status is predicated solely on their own personal initiative. The United States is at that point in its history where qualifications and not race or color matter. If it is true that race is no longer a significant factor in the ability of a person of color to succeed, then there is no need for race conscious policies. Indeed some have maintained that Obama’s election is proof that the United States has reached the point where color-blindness is the public attitude of most Americans. According to David Cochran, this color-blind paradigm relies on a particular set of normative categories in its understanding of race. These are its individualism, its focus on rights, its emphasis on fair procedures, its dedication to equality of opportunity, and its commitment to the principle of nondiscrimination. These categories lie at the heart of a powerful strand of liberal thought and practice over the past five decades, one that has become the dominant approach to issues of race12.

There is of course the strong version of color-blindness which entails that in our lives there should be no mentioning or consideration of race at all. Color-blindness in the context of this paper does not mean that we try to ignore race altogether. You can be proud of your race, claim your racial identity, you just cannot use race for public policy decisions. Color-blindness then becomes coupled with the distribution principle that goods be distributed according to merit. If the merit principle is applicable at this moment in American history, accordingly, we should embrace color-blind liberalism.

The move to what can be called “color-blind liberalism” should not be surprising to any one with knowledge of the social and political history of the United States. Given the history of racism it is not surprising that persons of all racial stripes would welcome color-blind principles. Indeed it has been the appeal of color-blindness that has prompted the enacting of laws to overturn many of the de jure segregation laws that were a part of this country’s racist history.

That President Obama would draw on the color-blind paradigm also should not be surprising either. He is, as he often states, the president of America, not black America. Let us put away for the moment the cynicism that we might hold that for him to win the Presidency, he had to take a color-blind position. Rev. Wright reminded us that in the end Obama is a politician13. Let us suppose for the sake of argument that Obama is deeply committed to a strong form of color-blind liberalism. That is, he thinks that at this moment in United States history we do not need to focus on race as a basis for public policy nor whom we elect for President. We need to and can look beyond race. We must be color-blind for the Country to move forward, together.

My aim in this paper will not be to discern what his stance on color-blindness is, but to show the importance of his stance as the focal point of current and future public policy. I

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will not herein be concerned with the division between the political right and left over what it means for a society to be color-blind, but will focus on Obama’s projection of “color-blindness” as the way to shape race relations and public policy. I contend that totally color-blind public policies are the wrong approach to solving the problem of inclusion of black Americans into the social and political fabric of the United States.

**Obama and Color-blindness**

Obama’s campaign and election rhetoric have consistently drawn on the color-blind principle. He gives no overt arguments against color-conscious policies; however, he just acts as if it is an obvious conclusion that public policy in the United States should be color-blind. In order to appreciate Obama’s position on color-blindness we must put his position in both a historical and sociological context. Here, I want to draw on his speech of March 18th, 2008. This speech was given to distance himself from his former pastor Rev. Jeremiah Wright and to set the racial/race agenda for his campaign and policy considerations as President. What is at issue here is Obama’s appeal to color-blindness as a focal point for his election. In this speech, among other things, Obama wants to express how the country has moved beyond race in very significant and important ways. While admitting that the country had a bad start regarding racial justice, the impetus for social justice was always present in the country’s moral space.

At one point in the speech, Obama sounds like a post-Garrison Frederick Douglass when he states his opinion on slavery and the Constitution. Obama states that: “Of course, the answer to the slavery question was already embedded within our Constitution – a Constitution that had at its very core the ideal of equal citizenship under the law; a Constitution that promised its people liberty, and justice, and a union that could be and should be perfected over time.” The United States, accordingly, was founded on principles that embodied respect for the individual and the task was to make the country live up to these principles. The goal has always been to celebrate individuals not races. Of course, the goal has not been reached. Obama states that his campaign is part of the historical push to make the United States a place where the individual can achieve to the best of his or her ability regardless of his or her race.

**Obama:** “This was one of the tasks we set forth at the beginning of this campaign – to continue the long march of those who came before us, a march for a more just, more equal, more free, more caring and more prosperous America. I chose to run for the presidency at this moment in history because I believe deeply that we cannot solve the challenges of our time unless we solve them together – unless we perfect our union by understanding that we may have different stories, but we hold common hopes; that we may not look the same and we may not have come from the same place, but we all want to move in the same direction – towards a better future for our children and our grandchildren.”

At this point, Obama begins some not so subtle shifts in his focus on what race means in the United States. The first move is from the African American experience in the United States to the emigrant experience. The story he tells of his mother’s family is rooted in the emigrant story. Obama’s life story is a story framed within the legacy of the emigrant story.

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15 “Barack Obama’s Speech on Race in America”, hereafter “The Speech”.

16 Ibid.
Obama tells his now well-known life story, which I will not repeat. Obama notes, “It’s a story that hasn’t made me the most conventional candidate. But it is a story that has seared into my genetic makeup the idea that this nation is more than the sum of its parts – that out of many, we are truly one.”

It is the story of the United States as the land of opportunity and the freedoms that it affords to all and our understanding of these values that unite Americans regardless of race, color, or creed. It is Obama’s contention that it is these values that make us one great country. Still he understands that some people want to divide the country at a time people are looking for unity.

**Obama:** “Throughout the first year of this campaign, against all predictions to the contrary, we saw how hungry the American people were for this message of unity. Despite the temptation to view my candidacy through a purely racial lens, we won commanding victories in states with some of the whitest populations in the country. In South Carolina, where the Confederate Flag still flies, we built a powerful coalition of African-Americans and white Americans.”

It was clear that people were willing and could see beyond race. While some people were willing to be color-blind, others were not. The ugly specter of race began to intrude on his campaign. His own racial identity became a problem.

**Obama:** “At various stages in the campaign, some commentators have deemed me either ‘too black’ or ‘not black enough’. We saw racial tensions bubble to the surface during the week before the South Carolina primary. The press has scoured every exit poll for the latest evidence of racial polarization, not just in terms of white and black, but black and brown as well.”

Still many people in the United States were able to see beyond race until his former pastor interjected race in a nasty way into the campaign. Wright called into question America’s commitment to social justice for African Americans. Obama thinks that Wright took the discussion of race in a particularly divisive turn. Obama uses this moment to discuss the manner in which race and race conscious policies have impacted on both blacks and whites at opposite ends of the racial spectrum.

**Obama:** “On one end of the spectrum, we’ve heard the implication that my candidacy is somehow an exercise in affirmative action; that it’s based solely on the desire of wide-eyed liberals to purchase racial reconciliation on the cheap. On the other end, we’ve heard my former pastor, Reverend Jeremiah Wright, use incendiary language to express views that have the potential not only to widen the racial divide, but views that denigrate both the greatness and the goodness of our nation; that rightly offend white and black alike.”

Obama tells a story of the history of racism in the United States. He notes that Blacks have been subject to all sorts of racist policies and restrictions. It is this history that drives Rev. Wright and many older black Americans. He then draws the following conclusion regarding Rev. Wright:

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17 Ibid.
18 Ibid.
19 Ibid.
Obama: “This is the reality in which Reverend Wright and other African-Americans of his generation grew up. They came of age in the late fifties and early sixties, a time when segregation was still the law of the land and opportunity was systematically constricted. What’s remarkable is not how many failed in the face of discrimination, but rather how many men and women overcame the odds; how many were able to make a way out of no way for those like me who would come after them”20.

In essence, persons like Rev. Wright are still locked in a vision of the United States that reflects a terrible history, but in fact it is history. Wright and like-minded blacks have not moved beyond their memories of a race conscious United States. They are out of touch with the current social reality of the United States regarding race. They have failed to embrace the truly color-blind nature of the United States at this moment in history. On the other end of the spectrum, we find whites that are resentful about what they perceive to be the loss of their economic and social standing because of race conscious policies that seem to favor blacks. Obama notes that we must also understand that there is white resentment.

Obama: “In fact, a similar anger exists within segments of the white community. Most working- and middle-class white Americans don’t feel that they have been particularly privileged by their race. Their experience is the immigrant experience – as far as they’re concerned, no one’s handed them anything, they’ve built it from scratch. They’ve worked hard all their lives, many times only to see their jobs shipped overseas or their pension dumped after a lifetime of labor. They are anxious about their futures, and feel their dreams slipping away; in an era of stagnant wages and global competition, opportunity comes to be seen as a zero sum game, in which your dreams come at my expense. So when they are told to bus their children to a school across town; when they hear that an African American is getting an advantage in landing a good job or a spot in a good college because of an injustice that they themselves never committed; when they’re told that their fears about crime in urban neighborhoods are somehow prejudiced, resentment builds over time”21.

He continues:

“Like the anger within the black community, these resentments aren’t always expressed in polite company. But they have helped shape the political landscape for at least a generation. Anger over welfare and affirmative action helped forge the Reagan Coalition. Politicians routinely exploited fears of crime for their own electoral ends. Talk show hosts and conservative commentators built entire careers unmasking bogus claims of racism while dismissing legitimate discussions of racial injustice and inequality as mere political correctness or reverse racism”22.

It is the appeal to race that exacerbates these feelings of resentment. Accordingly, we must move beyond race. Holding on to bad memories and the media keeps the racial animosity potboiling23. Public Policies that seem to favor one race over the other are another part of the problem. Obama thinks that we must acknowledge that both blacks and whites

20 Ibid.
21 Ibid.
22 Ibid.
have bad feelings regarding race-based policies in the United States. What should blacks do?

**Obama**: “For the African American community, that path means embracing the burdens of our past without becoming victims of our past. It means continuing to insist on a full measure of justice in every aspect of American life. But it also means binding our particular grievances – for better health care, and better schools, and better jobs – to the larger aspirations of all Americans – the white woman struggling to break the glass ceiling, the white man whose been laid off, the immigrant trying to feed his family. And it means taking full responsibility for own lives – by demanding more from our fathers, and spending more time with our children, and reading to them, and teaching them that while they may face challenges and discrimination in their own lives, they must never succumb to despair or cynicism; they must always believe that they can write their own destiny.”

Obama notes that Rev. Wright often preached what to many would seem like a conservative social position: “Ironically, this quintessentially American – and yes, conservative – notion of self-help found frequent expression in Reverend Wright’s sermons. But what my former pastor too often failed to understand is that embarking on a program of self-help also requires a belief that society can change.” Thus, it is not by means of race-based policies that the problems of blacks in America can be solved; policies must be color-blind coupled with individual responsibility. He then insists that blacks must believe that society has changed and can continue to change to improve the social and economic standing of blacks. In this regard, appeals to race-based public policies would be counter-productive. What must whites do?

Whites must understand black resentment! Whites must understand that there has been a history of racism that has impacted negatively on the economic and social standing of blacks. Blacks must understand White resentment. But in the end we must look beyond race.

**Obama**: “If we disregard race we can look beyond historical impediments that have been used to hold or prevent persons of color making substantial social and economic gains in the United States. Drawing on color denies the mutual respect individuals should have. Not that we forget the history but the history cannot hold us down or separate. Whites must respect the history of racism and blacks must respect the feelings of whites that their understanding of the world has been shaken.”

According to Obama, we must move beyond race. To do less will make the possibility of social progress nearly impossible. We should remember the history, but also remember that it is history. It is not the America in which we now find ourselves. Race has played a divisive role in the relationships between all persons in the United States. However, we are now at a different point in American history, a moment when character matters more than race. Accordingly, we must remember this if we are to perfect this union.

**Obama**: “In the end, then, what is called for is nothing more, and nothing less, than what all the world’s great religions demand – that we do unto others as we would have them do unto us. Let us be our brother’s keeper, Scripture tells us. Let us be our sister’s keeper.”

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24 Ibid.  
25 Ibid.
Let us find that common stake we all have in one another, and let our politics reflect that spirit as well.\(^{26}\)

Obama ends with a story of a white woman working for him because of his policies and the black man she was able to convince to work for Obama. In sum, his white supporters have been able to see beyond race and see the man (Obama) for his beliefs and principles. Many whites have become color-blind. If Blacks can come to this position America will move forward. The goal then is to create a society in which opportunities are not stalled because of those things for which a person is not responsible, particularly race or gender.\(^{27}\) It is however, up to the individuals to take responsibility for their own lives.

While, I must admit that these are noble goals and goals that we should work to achieve; we must admit that there is a big difference between citizens being color-blind in their choice of a presidential candidate and the president advocating color-blindness as the method of distribution of social goods. Race and racism still plays an important role in the lives of black Americans, indeed all Americans. We cannot and should not forget this important social fact.

**Color-blindness and Obama**

According to Obama, race is no longer the most important factor preventing a person from being successful in the United States. What matters most is hard work, personal responsibility, and a belief and hope in America’s ability to provide the best possible life for all of its citizens, regardless of race, gender, or ethnic background. What impression does this way of viewing the current racial climate in the United States create about race relations in the United States and those programs that might be direct to the problems of African Americans? Obama makes the not-so-subtle shift from color-blindness in voting to color-blindness in public policy. In doing so, he in the past three years through his policies and statements has

1. Given the false impression that societal racism has lessened to a much greater degree than it has.
2. Made it more difficult to propose social programs that are color conscious.
3. Given the impression that color-blindness is absolute for all public policy.
4. Taken away race-talk as a factor in public policy.

These claims, if true, will have serious implications for the future economic and social standing of African Americans. Obama seems to be asking Blacks to give up insistence on race based public policies and view their future economic and social progress on programs solely meant to benefit all Americans. What is being asserted is that while it may be true that race and racism played an important part in the history of race relations, race and race conscious policies cannot be used to correct for the current conditions in which blacks find themselves. Hard work and personal responsibility are more important now. It is character that counts more than race. The questions are: Have we reached a stage in American history where character and qualifications trump the color of one’s skin? Has racism diminished enough to not require race-based public policies? Obama appears to think that both of these questions can be answered in the affirmative.

\(^{26}\) Ibid.

\(^{27}\) Boxill, 1984.
Some will object and claim that Obama had to say and act like he does to get elected and reelected. In fact, Obama’s plan is like William J. Wilson’s hidden agenda in his book *The Truly Disadvantaged*. Wilson argues that we must hide programs for Blacks in program policies that are class based. We know if we try to use race based programs whites will not support them. In support of Obama, some will claim that he is just being pragmatic in that he could acknowledge that race is a problem, but it is not the major problem that needs his concern at the present moment. He also understands that to bring a discussion of race into the political mix will bog the country down. Here is the intellectual rub: Obama calls for Blacks to believe in a positive future in the United States and not make appeals to race or color conscious public policies. He is asking African Americans to put their faith in future Presidents to have their (Blacks) best interests as an important part of their public policy agenda. Should black Americans take this bet? I think not!

Obama understands the pressure coming from both blacks and whites regarding race and his presidency. Blacks want him to show that he understands the plight of blacks and will do something positive as President to address their concerns. He is, indeed, black. Whites, on the other hand, want him to show no favoritism towards blacks. He is, indeed, black. Obama therefore must walk the line between supporting black interest and not offending white racial sensitivities. This may be why he couches his public policies as benefiting all Americans regardless of race. Still he has to show blacks that his programs have a positive impact on the black community, while these programs are geared to the larger American community.

President Obama also understands that some of his critics have strongly suggested that he has forsaken the black community. To address these charges, he appeared on BET TV to address black America and explain why his programs and policies were the best for all Americans including the majority of black Americans. In this interview, the President was asked about targeting programs to and for the African-American community. The President said that targeting one specific group is “not how America works.” He continues that his policies are meant to help all Americans who are suffering at this time. Admitting that blacks are being hurt disproportionately, he thinks the majority of African Americans will be helped with his policies: “What has always made this country great is the belief that everybody has got a chance.”“Regardless of race, regardless of creed”. Public policies must be race and color-blind in order to help all Americans. In the end, Obama asks the African-American community to work hard, take responsibility for their lives and believe that all boats will rise with the improving economic tide. They must also believe that he is doing his part to make life better for all Americans. He is the President of all Americans; he is not just the president of black America. A few weeks later, President Obama released a 44-page report on the positive impact his policies were having on the black community. There is some criticism that the report is very similar to the report on the poor given a few weeks earlier but this time with the emphasis on black Americans.

Has racism diminished enough to not require any race-based policies? Obama’s speeches and public pronouncements seem to adhere to the belief that it has. In the end we must ask: Does Obama’s move to color-blindness help or hurt the future of race relations in the United States? This is where the intellectual rubber meets the road. As I noted Obama adeptly draws on the liberal conception of the individual as the locus of social respect. We

28 Wilson, 2006.
29 “The President Discusses the Economic Crisis”.
31 “The President’s Agenda and the African American Community”. 
must look to those attributes to which the individual is responsible for to assess his or her accomplishments. People must take responsibility for their condition. The government should be working to make the lives of all citizens better regardless of race. Public policies must be colorblind. By drawing on color-blindness Obama does two things: he affirms the individual responsibility tradition that many whites and most blacks feel and he distances himself from issues of social justice that arise out of the civil rights era. This is not to deny the significant changes in the United States regarding race, it is, nonetheless, still unclear how deep these changes are in the hearts and minds of many white United States citizens. (Remember Obama only ask whites to understand that some Blacks are still resentful because of the history of racism.) Even if there is a deep and profound change in the attitudes of whites toward blacks, race conscious policies are needed to address some/many of the social problems confronting black Americans. (Blacks are asked to have faith and believe that the country will take their problems seriously.) These problems were caused by the use of race conscious policies and race conscious policies are needed to address the problems. If this is true then race-talk has to be a part of the nation’s public policy discussion and race-conscious policies are needed to correct for past and current social injustices.

**Pragmatism and Race-Talk**

At this point, the reader might question what this has to do with pragmatism or what can pragmatism add to this discussion of public policy and race. In a pragmatic fashion, I needed to contextualize the above discussion of public policy and race-talk. I now want to draw on the work of philosopher Paul Taylor to show how a Deweyan pragmatic understanding of the role of race-talk can be used as a provocative critique of the Obama position on public policy and colorblindness. In what follows I will briefly articulate what I take to be important aspects of Taylor’s analysis of a Deweyan pragmatism. I will then argue for the value of race-talk and race conscious public policies.

Taylor starts with the Deweyan insight that inquiry starts with a problem. The problem for the United States is how to complete the task of incorporating members of that population that have a history of chattel slavery into the full social and political fabric of the United States. This problem has historically been called the “Negro Problem”33. The problem has been in the United States: “What to do with the Negro?” The “Negro” problem for many persons in the United States was resolved with the passage of the Civil Rights Acts. Any problems blacks encounter currently cannot be attributed to societal racism, but to their own personal failings. Again race-talk or color conscious policies are unneeded to resolve the problems of African Americans. Can Dewey help us here?

Using what he takes to be both a narrow and wide sense of Deweyan pragmatism, Taylor thinks he can give some social and political insight that while it may not solve the problem helps us to understand why race-talk is still needed to address the “Negro” problem. According to Taylor in the narrow, instrumental sense, pragmatism is the view that Dewey equated with this claim, “knowledge is instrumental to the enrichment of immediate expe-

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33 See, for example, Dubois, “Souls”: “BETWEEN me and the other world there is ever an unasked question: unasked by some through feelings of delicacy; by others through the difficulty of rightly framing it. All, nevertheless, flutter round it. They approach me in a half-hesitant sort of way, eye me curiously or compassionately, and then, instead of saying directly, How does it feel to be a problem? they say, I know an excellent colored man in my town; or, I fought at Mechanicsville; or, Do not these Southern outrages make your blood boil? At these I smile, or am interested, or reduce the boiling to a simmer, as the occasion may require. To the real question, How does it feel to be a problem? I answer seldom a word.”
rience through the control over action that it exercises.” Taylor acknowledges that there is an evasive epistemology lurking behind this claim, but he is concerned with the manner in which this narrow pragmatic thesis expresses two familiar ideas. The first idea, call it practicalism, is that the condition of knowing involves being poised to intervene productively in the world’s proceedings. The knowledge must be useful; it must help us make things better for us and our fellow humans:

Dewey describes knowledge as something that enriches experience. From this perspective, knowing how things stand involves – but is not equivalent to – being in a position to interact harmoniously and fruitfully with them. Knowledge is an instrument, and knowing is a practice and skill that helps us getting along better in the world.

The second familiar idea behind the narrow pragmatic thesis, call it contextualism, is that inquiry, or the pursuit of knowledge, is value-laden and situational. According to Taylor, “Dewey had in mind the now common point that we come to any inquiry, experiment, or question with aims, interests, desires, presumptions, and habits, and that these have some bearing on the answer that we get from the world or from our interlocutor.” We must examine and understand who is asking the question and why: “Thinking, we are too accustomed to saying, is relative; knowledge is pursued and produced somewhere, some when, and by someone, and these variable factors are not inconsequential.” In this regard, who and why someone is asking the question is as important as the question. Persons of color in the United States who think that race and racism still impact on their lives are asking different questions about the use of race than the politician who is trying to present his or herself as a person of the people. Attending to the context of inquiry helps us decide which theoretical vocabulary is most appropriate to the situation, and to choose between theoretical vocabularies is also to choose between sets of entities and forces. The question of what kinds of policies are needed to improve the lot of African Americans will have differing answers depending on who is asking. There is the belief that there is some “real” perspective from which to answer the question. Dewey resisted this reductionist impulse. He insisted that there are different levels, different reals, valid for different purposes, and he made this contextualist pluralism an integral part of his pragmatism. It is often the case that there are certain ideological assumptions lurking beneath the epistemological surface of the answers proposed:

As individuals, we are more or less likely to see certain things in certain ways, sometimes because of the habits of cognition and perception into which we’ve been socialized, sometimes because of our deep and abiding interest in things being a certain way-a way, as it might be, that preserves our place in a power structure, or that undermines someone else’s. Knowing this, we may wish to find some way of supplementing individual contributions to the process of inquiry, or of bringing individual interests and commitments to light (especially if, as it might be, these interests are opaque even to the agent in question).

34 Taylor, 2004: 164.
35 Ibid.
36 Ibid
37 Ibid
38 Ibid.
39 Ibid.
40 Ibid.
41 Taylor, 2004: 165.
According to Taylor, “This is why Dewey insisted on the cooperative and self-corrective character of intelligent inquiry, and on the role of philosophy as, in his words, a criticism of the influential beliefs that underlie culture” (ibid.). Nonetheless, Taylor’s approach to Dewey’s pragmatism is not solely from the standpoint of an instrumentalist epistemology. It has a broader, metaphilosophical view. Like the narrower view, this metaphilosophy can be broken down into a few now familiar ideas. He refers to these as naturalism, experimentalism, and sodalism.

By “naturalism” Taylor means to indicate a view with both metaphysical and methodological aspects. On the metaphysical side there are no intrinsically non-natural entities. A naturalist rejects the view of the super-natural and insists that the world is through and through a place of nomological regularities.

Put another way, a way that highlights the methodological aspect of the view, the Deweyan naturalist holds that nothing is in principle inexplicable or inaccessible to the methods of science, even if, as it might be, we lack the cognitive or perceptual endowment that’s necessary for finding the right explanations. For this Deweyan methodological naturalist, the basic pattern of explanation and inquiry used for science can usefully be generalized to other realms of human activity, including, as Dewey put it, the “social and humane subjects”.

Taylor is quick to note: “This is not, as some have thought, an uncritical valorization of the scientific method and enterprise; it is, rather, an appeal to an ideal of science as a critical, cooperative, and self-corrective method for turning up resources to enrich human life” (ibid.). So a Deweyan methodological naturalism also demands a historicist and contextual sensibility. Science and reason can help us address the problems facing humans. This leads to the second element of Taylor’s broad notion of pragmatism, experimentalism. He uses this label to indicate the view that, under the irremediable conditions of human finitude, all we can do is act, though more or less intelligently, and take our chances with the outcomes. Conduct is always dogged by the possibility of error, and though we try to minimize this possibility through the applications of intelligence, we can never shake it. That’s what it is to be human. We must be willing to experiment with plans and policies. Dewey often criticized the philosophic fascination with necessity and certainty, with transcultural and supra-historical standards, a fascination that he traced to the desire for metaphysical guarantees (which he in turn traced to antiquated notions of knowledge and experience and to something akin to existential dread). We must act boldly without a safety net. Pragmatic experimentalism rejects this quest for certainty and accepts instead the irreducible possibility of error, the radical contingency of things, and the need to act, to hypothesize and experiment, even in the absence of guarantees.

The third element in Taylor’s broad notion of pragmatism is sodalism. He notes that he adopted this term from the word “sodality:” which in one of its senses means a fellowship, society, or association of any kind. He admits that the word is inelegant, but it captures what he wants to convey about the role of associations as a basic feature of the human condition, and because all of the other words he might use to point to this perspective-communalism, socialism, holism-have connotations that are not relevant for his purposes.

What I call pragmatic sodalism is concerned with the fact of human association in two respects. First of all, the broad sense of pragmatism takes philosophy to be an instrument for social improvement. Dewey’s commitment to this view can be seen in his condemnation of philosophy that privileges abstract technical problems over the problems of everyday life.

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42 Taylor, 2004: 166.
people. It can be seen in his depiction of philosophy as a kind of vision, as a practice of putting forward imaginative prophecies, which is to say hypotheses, of how the world might look if we comport ourselves differently. And it can be seen in his characterization of philosophy as a kind of criticism, in the definition I mentioned in the discussion of contextualism.

In this regard, sodalism moves us away from the focus on individual and turns our attention to the communal associative nature of our lives. In this view, social problems may not become apparent, to say nothing of being solvable, until we ascend from the level of individual agency to the level of collective consequences, at which the patterns of social practice that “conjoint behavior” produces become more readily discernible.

At this point Taylor thinks that he can give what would count as a pragmatic account of race. First, as a species of practicalism it would approach race theory as a practical endeavor, as an undertaking that helps us deal with, to paraphrase Dewey, the problems of people. This means taking a hard look at the social realities facing people. The theories and devices that are needed to navigate one’s life must take into account this reality. Taylor correctly notes: “Telling me that there are no races, even while populations mostly coterminous with the ones we used to think of as races can still be systematically distinguished by appeal to all sorts of social measures, is probably not an approach that helps me get around in a world shaped by white supremacy” (ibid.). His second point draws on the application of contextualism: pragmatic racialism would approach race-thinking, and accounts of race-thinking, as in conversation with their places and times, as the product of interaction among humans and between humans and their environments, and as situation-specific stories about social life. It would, in other words, concede that the concept of race depends on a particular cultural history for its very existence, and that specific applications or developments of the concept depend on particular local histories and conditions.

Taylor admits to some this may seem to some to provide a reduction to any kind of racialism, but what it is doing is taking into account the social history that gave rise to the role of race in a given social context. Important for Taylor, in its third aspect as an instance of experimentalism, is to deny that races must appear on every ontological level in order to exist, and that “race” must refer to something transhistorical and (ontologically) objective in order to successfully refer. The experimentalist embrace of contingency also entails an insistence on the need to act, to be willing to intervene in ongoing processes and initiate change for the sake of improving existing conditions.

Fourth, as a variety of naturalism, pragmatic racialism would reject out of hand the kind of super-naturalism that attends some varieties of racial essentialism. It would hold that we must account for the commonalities that unite members of a race, if there are any, without violating our usual patterns of observation and inference, and without suspending our commitment to the rest of what we count as knowledge.

We must see the development of the attitudes and practices of race and racism as Dewey sometimes said of other things, as a historical growth, as something that has come into being under specific but variable conditions. To do less, would be to reduce the complexity. Finally, as a sodalistic perspective, pragmatic racialism is anti-individualist.

A pragmatic racialism rejects the demand to reduce all collective action to the intentions of individuals and to assess all social phenomena from the standpoint of the individual. Instead, it accepts populations as in some respects, for some purposes, basic entities, which

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means locating individuals on the broader social terrain, and identifying individual perspectives as necessarily partial windows onto the relevant terrain. Taylor gives an example from Dubois.

I might decide that I don’t want to be black, but, to use Dubois’s famous “test” from *Dusk of Dawn*, if I am on a train in the state of Georgia in 1940, looking the way I do, I’d have to ride in the Jim Crow car, with all the black people. I’m not in a good position to interact with the world, to resist it even, unless I recognize what’s likely to happen to me; and racial categories are an efficient and effective way of summing up my prospects under the conditions of white supremacy-as well as a point of entry into existing lines of antiracist organizing. So my pragmatism encourages me to add that I’d have to ride Jim Crow with all the other black people—not because we give racism the last word about who we are, but because effectively responding to racism requires realistically assessing how things are, and because centuries of antiracist work have made racial categories available as resources for mobilizing against racist assaults.

I want to draw from Taylor the following: The social condition in which black Americans find themselves is a real condition of their experience of racism in the United States. Race has played and plays an important role in the living of their lives. They cannot live their lives as if race does not impact on the quality of their existence as citizens in the United States. If the leaders of the country are sincere about improving their status they must seriously take into account the manner in which race impacts on the economic and social existence of African Americans. A commitment to colorblindness in a society that is not colorblind seems to make little sense. If race still plays an important role in a group’s social condition, race-talk must be a part of the conversation about public policy in the United States. Given the history and current status of racism, to do less would be to impede the future progress of African Americans and indeed all American citizens.

**Race-talk, Color-conscious Policies, and Social Needs**

It may be objected that I still have not shown that we need color-conscious policies, particularly race based policies. While I believe that color-conscious policies are both needed and permissible, my aim in this paper is much more modest. I only wanted to raise what I see as a problem with President Obama’s seemingly unabashed support for color-blindness and not talking about race and racism as serious social problems in the distribution of social goods. As Taylor notes:

> The vocabulary of race is a useful way of keeping track of a number of features of our conjoint social lives all at once-specifically, the features involved in the histories of systematically inequitable distributions, and in the continued patterning of social experiences and opportunity structures. It is a useful device because the concept has over the years come to connote registers of human experience-bodies, bloodlines, sex, and individual embedment-that might otherwise get obscured in social analyses, and because it can be used to abstract away from dimensions of experience-ethnicity, culture, and national origin-that receive adequate explanation in accounts that nevertheless fail to shed much light on specifically racial phenomena (involving the connections between bodies, bloodlines, and social location).

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If it is the case that African Americans are still denied housing, jobs, and other opportunities because of race, we do not live in a colorblind or post-racial America. This means, currently, race talk, race thinking, and race or color conscious public policies have work to do. It is clear that race and race consciousness still impacts on the lives of all Americans. The concern this raises for those of us who are concerned with issues of social justice is that President Obama, by claiming that his race neutral public policies will resolve the problems of the historic unjust race based distribution of social goods, takes race talk off the social agenda. By his actions and words, he is expressing the view that race-talk is unnecessary for social progress. This leads to the conclusion that whites will not support nor endorse race-based public policies that are meant to correct or ameliorate the social conditions of black folks. They (Whites) can rightly claim that the black President did not think the country needed race-based public policies.

However, if race-conscious policies are needed to address some of the problems that face the black community, President Obama should forthrightly say that this is the case. He can/will do this only if he takes the problem of racism in the United States seriously. President Obama knows that some of the problems that black Americans face are the result of current racist practices. He is also correct that these issues can or should be addressed by more strident equal enforcement of laws and programs that support the betterment of all Americans. There are, however, some problems that will require race-conscious policies. If it is the goal of the government to ensure that blacks get these social goods, race conscious policies will be needed.

Consider that at the present time we need black doctors to serve the larger black community, which is underserved. While programs like the National Health Service Corps attempts to get doctors to underserved areas, it has not provided enough physicians for these areas. Another problem with the NHS program is the lack of long-term commitment to these areas by the practicing physicians. In the case of underserved urban areas, doctors with a commitment to serve that population are needed. At this moment in our country’s history, this means doctors with roots in those communities and who are committed to working with that population are needed and must be recruited. One way, perhaps, not the only way is to recruit persons from these areas to medical school. But such a policy would be race conscious. It may be possible that given time, enough black doctors would graduate from medical school to meet the need, or the government would make reimbursements sufficiently high enough to entice white doctors to work in these areas, or medical schools will train doctors with the necessary cultural sensitivity to want to work in those areas. There is also one more possibility: that the level of income will rise such that there are no longer any such communities. All of these are clearly long-term approaches. What should we do in the short-term?

If the United States Government wants to ensure that its black citizens will receive adequate health care in the near future, it will have to support policies that are race-conscious, in that they mark out race or ethnicity as a criterion for admission to medical school. This I think is a reasonable use of color-conscious race policies. One can only be surprised at this suggestion if he or she takes an ahistorical and decontextualized view of race and health care in the United States46. This is what a pragmatic understanding of race asks us to do, to take the social and historical context of racism into consideration.

If I am right here, then there are a number of social goods that can only be distributed at this time to the black community using race conscious policies. Legal, educational, and

46 Williams Rucker, 2000: 76.
health concerns are among the pressing social needs of the black community. Let me state that I realize that African Americans are not the only group with such pressing problems, nor am I picking on President Obama because he is black; I think the same issues face any President black or white.

Conclusion

Let me conclude by noting that I think that the election of a non-white male as President of the United States is significant and historic in nature. However, we must constantly be diligent in assessing President Obama’s symbolic behavior regarding color-blindness and public policy. His seeming reliance on color-blindness is problematic for the advancement of racial and social justice for African Americans and the country as a whole. Listening to the political pundits talk about the importance of the Obama campaign and election made me realize the urgency of keeping his policy considerations under constant scrutiny. People have been too quick to move to a post-racial mode when it is not justified. Truly, we are not at that space or place in United States history where race no longer matters.

In this regard, we need to keep assessing Obama’s public policies and, in particular, his guiding principles regarding the use of race. We need to do this because it forces us to constantly re-think the social and political status of those persons who have been consistently overlooked in the move to a more perfect union. There may come a time when color-blindness is the call of the hour, but we are not at that place or space now. To this end, a pragmatic understanding of race helps us to see why we still need both race-talk and race-conscious policies. While the current economic downturn cannot be solely blamed on Obama, how the country deals with the issue of race and racism when the economy bounces back is to some degree in his control. We need to keep race-talk on the public policy agenda.

Obama, it could be claimed, is not against all color or race based public policies. Even if this is true, we have to be concerned with the symbolism of his actions. In his press conferences, he again and again pushes against connecting race as a factor in his presidency or his public policies. I want to raise two other concerns about his approach. First, by claiming that race need not be a factor in one’s ability to succeed, President Obama gives the impression that it is the social behavior of blacks rather than the racism in society that prevents Blacks from advancing. This position takes the moral responsibility off whites and the government for past and current racist policies. Second, and closely connected to the first, the social responsibility approach reinforces the racist attitudes many whites have about blacks as lazy and not wanting to do what is necessary to make it in the United States. This reading of black behavior gives the impression that blacks are not worthy of being supported against racism beyond what has been done. Whites, as Obama noted, are resentful of blacks getting some advantage they (blacks) do not deserve. Is Obama fueling White animosity? Philosophers such as James Sterba and Elizabeth Anderson have published arguments that they think if given serious consideration by whites will reduce white animosity, if not to race-conscious policies, at least to some forms of Affirmative Action. One can only hope that they are correct in their assessments of white resentment towards blacks. Let me note that I am not claiming that societal racism relieves some blacks of any blame for their behavior, but only that the behavior of blacks is shaped in part by the racist social structure in which we are all forced to live.

48 Lawson, 2011.
As for our thinking about President Obama and colorblindness, it is important to note that his behavior regarding issues of race will set the tone for how many Americans understand the use of race in public policy, now and for years to come. Given his behavior and rhetoric over the past three years, race talk and color conscious policies will be forever off the political agenda. We must remember that the President’s behavior is very symbolic. People are very symbol minded so we have to pay attention to symbols. Regardless of how significant President Obama’s election was/is, we must call into question those behaviors that we think will do more harm than good. As Dubois said at the end of chapter 3 of Souls: “We have no right to sit silently by while the inevitable seeds are sown for a harvest of disaster to our children, black and white”49.

Bibliography


49 “Souls”.


Section III. Pragmatist Appropriations
Abstract. Traditionally pragmatists have been favorably disposed to improving our understanding of agency and ethics through the use of empirical research. In the last two decades simulation theory has been championed in certain cognitive science circles as a way of explaining how we attribute mental states and predict human behavior. Drawing on research in psychology and neuroscience, Alvin I. Goldman and Robert M. Gordon have not only used simulation theory to discuss how we “mindread”, but have suggested that the theory has implications for ethics. The limitations of simulation theory for “mindreading” and ethics are addressed in this article from an interactionist or neo-Meadian pragmatic perspective. To demonstrate the limitations of simulation theory scenes from the television show Mad Men are used as “thought-experiments”.

Not long ago I began to read in earnest about the simulation and theory theory or folk psychology debate in cognitive science. I was led to this debate in researching contemporary approaches to agency in social psychology. Quite coincidently I found myself watching the television series Mad Men. For those of you unfamiliar with the series, the title refers to the ad men primarily on Madison Avenue in the 1960’s. How fortunate, I thought, to be watching a show about a profession in which the name of the game is simulation or mindreading of a sort, and not only from individual to individual but from individual to groups. If anyone has a better than average ability to mindread—for example, to determine the beliefs and predict the decisions of others—it would be these folks. Now I realize that there is a danger of confusing fiction with fact by appealing to a TV series, but good fiction, which by and large this series has been, is often nuanced in dealing with interpersonal relationships, consolidating our own experiences in well-crafted scenes. Such scenes can help to illuminate theories of mindreading in a manner that parallels more traditional thought experiments. And let me assure the reader in advance that my use of Mad Men will not require you to have watched the show.

I will address important features of simulation theory in order to argue that many of its most valuable insights can be found in a tradition influenced by George Herbert Mead. But my interests here are not merely antiquarian. I intend to show that a neo-Median model of how we relate to others can highlight weaknesses in simulation theory. It can also assist in addressing ethical questions in a more sophisticated and comprehensive way than simulation theory, whether it is the hybrid model defended by Alvin I. Goldman or the transformation approach of Robert M. Gordon. My goal is to entice readers into considering how a neo-Median framework might offer a productive path for future reflections and research in ethics.

1 A version of this article was presented as the Keynote Address at the 65th Annual Mountain-Plains Philosophy Conference, Denver, Colorado, October 2011. I wish to thank Candice Shelby and Catherine Kemp for their suggestions.
Before drawing on some examples from *Mad Men* to illustrate aspects of simulation theory, it’s appropriate to let two influential simulation theorists say a few words about how they view their models. We turn first to Alvin Goldman and his understanding of the differences between simulation theory and theory theory, and then to Robert Gordon. Of course their positions contain nuances that can’t be captured by relatively brief quotations. Nevertheless, these carefully crafted summary statements will help to set the stage. I quote first from Goldman’s response to criticisms of his book, *Simulating Minds*, made by Perner and Brandl.

Suppose an attributor wishes to mindread a target’s decision. If she uses simulation, she will generate a “pretend” decision of her own, extract that decision, and project it onto the target. If she uses theory, on the other hand, she will not produce a pretend – or genuine – decision at all. She will form a *belief* about the target’s decision, based on purely factual or theoretical reasoning from her (the attributor’s) beliefs about the targets prior preferences, prior beliefs, and psychological laws (Goldman 2009: 478).

Early in his recent book, *Simulating Minds*, Goldman spells out his understanding of the basics of simulation with regard to decision making in this way.

Predicting another’s decision is a stock example that ST aims to explain. It says that an attributor goes about this task by imaginatively putting herself into the target’s shoes. She pretends to have the same initial states – for example, the same desires and beliefs – and then makes a decision given those initial, pretend states. Having made a decision in the pretend mode, the attributor predicts that this is the decision that the target will make (Goldman 2006: 19).

Properly speaking this sort of mindreading – one that involves pretence, imagination, and prediction – is high-level simulation. This is distinguished from low-level simulation, which is a relatively primitive form of simulation for Goldman, one that involves, for example, reading basic emotions from facial expressions. This distinction is not accepted by all simulation theorists. Further, Goldman is challenged by one of the parents of simulation theory regarding a basic feature of his account. According to Robert Gordon, simulation doesn’t involve turning to one’s own mental states in order to help determine what the other is thinking. Gordon understands simulation in terms of the transformation of oneself into the other. The exemplary case is that of the actor who transforms himself into the character he is playing. Shaun Gallagher presents Gordon’s position in the following fashion.

I do not retreat introspectively to my own mind to run simulation routines by manipulating propositional attitudes like beliefs and desires. Rather, I put myself in the other person’s perspective and look to see what she thinks is true about the world. This involves a transformation that takes place on the personal level. By using my imagination, I imagine/simulate what the other person must think in her situation. I do not imagine myself in her situation; I imagine *her* in her situation, by imaginatively occupying her situation. The transformation involves an egocentric shift, but does not involve either introspection of my own mental states, or inference making about the other’s mental states. I am not concerned with mental states at all. I imagine, in the first-person, how the other person sees the world (Gallagher 2007: 66-67).
Gordon’s position can be seen as responding to Daniel Dennett and others who have claimed that Goldman’s model is open to the standard critiques that have been leveled against approaches to mindreading that employ analogy. In Gordon’s words,

One reason I emphasize transformation is that a number of writers, both pro and con the simulation theory, take simulation to involve an implicit inference from oneself to others. It is essentially the old argument from analogy, which requires that you first recognize your own mental states, perhaps under certain imagined hypothetical conditions, and then infer that the other is in similar states (Gordon 1995: 734).

Needless to say, Goldman has a retort, and is unwilling to cede ground on the importance of some form of introspection for the simulation process. In responding to Gordon, he states, “Thus, as I interpret ST, it naturally invites an introspective approach to first-person attribution…. [T]here is empirical evidence that third-person mindreading involves use of a brain region responsible for self-reference or self-reflection” (Goldman 2006: 187).

Having briefly outlined some of the features of simulation theory, and with caveats that Goldman views his theory as a hybrid, employing both simulation and folk psychology, and that Gordon is quite prepared to acknowledge that hypothetical reasoning has a place in mindreading, we turn to Mad Men.

The central character in Mad Men is Don Draper. He is a whiz at figuring out what will motivate people to buy products. But his talent appears to be mysterious to his colleagues. They stand in awe of how quickly he can determine the right move. We, the audience, have more information about Don than do his colleagues. We know that Don Draper was originally born Dick Whitman. We know that he has lived most of his adult life under an assumed name. We also know enough about his biography – his traumatic childhood, his abusive father – to suggest why he might be so good at his job. He is a person who has had to pay close attention to others in order to survive, first as a child and then as an adult pretending to be someone else. There are four scenes from the show that I wish to discuss, three directly involving Don.

Scene one (Mad Men, 2009A). Conrad Hilton has called Don to his hotel suite. They had met at a party but Don didn’t know at the time that the man behind a bar, Connie, was Conrad Hilton. It seems that Connie has now tracked him down and wants to talk. He suspects that Don might be really good at his profession. This could be big business for Don. It’s Hilton, after all. Within minutes of entering the suite, Connie wants Don to give him advice on an ad campaign. Don resists. He says to Connie, “I think that you wouldn’t be in the presidential suite right now if you worked for free”. Hilton pushes back. “Don, this is friendly”. Don retorts, “Connie, this is my profession; what do you want me to do?” Connie wants him to give him one for free. The mock-ups for the ads are right in front of them on the coffee table. Don lights a cigarette and takes an effortless look. They show hotels with friendly mouse mascots in the foreground. Don briefly pauses and then states his view. “I don’t think anyone wants to think about a mouse in a hotel”. Hilton realizes that Don is obviously right, even though he admits that the ad campaign was his idea. Chagrined, he asks, “You got something better?”. And the courting dance continues.

Here is the background for the second scene that we want to consider. The staff in the office of Don’s agency becomes aware that there has been a terrible crash of an American

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2 If successful advertising utilizes simulation, it does so for strategic reasons. Ad men, mad men, aren’t interested in mutual understanding in the manner in which Habermas would define it. No, they are interested in figuring out the other in order to manipulate him or her.
Airlines plane in NY. Presumably everyone is lost. There is black humor around the office about the crash. One of the executives at the agency, Duck, claims to have a personal relationship with a high level executive at American Airlines. Duck knows that American Airlines is very worried about how the crash will affect the company. He believes that they will be looking for a new ad agency. He also believes that their agency can hook them. In a horrible twist of fate, one of the most ambitious young executives in the office, Pete Campbell, learns that his father, with whom he did not get along, died in the crash. In spite of this loss, Duck wants Pete to join him in a meeting with his contact, Shel, at the university club. Pete, naturally, feels very uncomfortable. He doesn’t think he can do it.

The scene that we wish to consider opens with Duck sitting in the university club with Shel (Mad Men, 2008). The lighting is low and they are comfortably ensconced in leather chairs, drinks nearby. But things are not going well. Shel is hedging, claiming that it’s going to be tough to switch to a new agency. Then Pete shows up. Duck introduces him to Shel as his agency’s best. Shel reiterates, we don’t know where we are yet. Pete tries a typical sales pitch, asserting how enthusiastic they are about working with American Airlines. Shel is not moved. And then Pete says, “We understand how delicate the process of rebuilding the public’s confidence will be”. Shel responds, “It’s not just the public, our stock holders”. Pete replies, “I want you to know that should you decide to bring us your business there will be someone on your account who knows exactly what you are going through...My father was on that plane”. Shel is shaken and moved. It is something he will pass on, that is, report to his colleagues. The audience is left with the impression that Pete’s revelation might have helped salvage the deal.

Scene three doesn’t involve the agency (Mad Men, 2009B). It takes place in an elementary school classroom. Don and his wife, Betty, have been called in for a teacher’s conference because their daughter, Sally, has been acting out and fighting in school. Betty is very pregnant and quiet. She clearly looks depressed, even pained. The teacher, Susan, is young and earnest. She presses Don and Betty about their daughter’s behavior. Betty, coolly emotional, reports, “My, um, father passed away (pause) last week, week before, two weeks now”. Susan becomes agitated and extremely apologetic. She walks over and holds Betty’s hand, saying, “I feel terrible for bringing that up for you”. Susan then asks, “Is this grandpa Gene we are talking about? Uh, that poor thing”. (Referring to their daughter). If only she (Susan) had known. How horrible! Susan continues, “Now I know why she was asking all of those questions about Medgar Evers’ murder”. Betty leaves the room and Susan discusses how Sally needs more attention with Don. She says that Sally is grieving. Of course she now understands their daughter’s behavior. Susan tells Don, “There is a special pain to losing someone at that age. I don’t know if you can understand that”. Don responds with a simple, “I can”. Betty returns.

The fourth scene is a follow-up to the classroom exchange (Mad Men, 2009B). That evening Susan calls Don and Betty at home. Don answers. The camera shifts back and forth from Don to Susan. Susan is smiling at first with a drink in hand. She has called to apologize about their meeting. Don wonders why. Susan becomes very serious. “My father died when I was eight and I might have overdone it relating to Sally in that way...I guess I can get caught up in things and lose perspective”. (There is a subtext here. Susan and Don appear to be attracted to each other, which adds further complexity to the interactions in the classroom, but we will pass on them here).

In terms of how these scenes relate to simulation theory, let’s start with the classroom scene first. If Goldman were to apply simulation theory to the people in this scene, it is unlikely that he would focus solely on low-level emotional simulation, which typically in-
volves the presence of the person to whom one is responding. Susan, the teacher, seems to be reacting to Betty in this fashion, although it is possible to interpret her reaction to Betty as also involving higher level simulation. But it is not Betty’s state that is the most obvious target for a higher level simulation. It is her daughter’s. The teacher uses her own feelings and beliefs, her own mental state, to help ascertain how Betty and Don’s daughter must be feeling because of the loss. Yet on reflection Susan is aware that she may have overreacted due to the loss of her father as a child. Besides violating the rules of decorum, she may not have simulated Sally correctly, and she definitely failed to simulate Don’s state of mind. He had in fact experienced the loss of his father as a child. If simulation is a process that is mediated by one’s own mental states, then there is always the possibility of misreading or failure due to an egocentric bias, according to Goldman. And this raises the issue of projection, which Goldman addresses.

I shall call the act of assigning a state of one’s own to someone else projection…[P]rojection is a standard part of the ST story of mindreading. It is the final stage of each mindreading act, a stage that involves no (further) simulation or pretend. Indeed, it typically involves an “exit” from the simulation mode that occupies the first stage of a two-stage routine (Goldman 2006: 40).

But if projection is a basic feature of ST, and if the model is best understood as simulation plus projection, how are we to avoid egocentric biases? There must be some mechanism that prevents us from getting too carried away with our own beliefs and emotions, as did Susan, when we are seeking to mindread. For Goldman the answer is that we quarantine “genuine states that don’t correspond to states of the target,” thereby keeping them out of the simulation. If they should intrude, “biases are likely to result. If leakage or quarantine failure is rampant, egocentric biases will also be rampant” (Goldman 2006: 41). Further, while simulation requires a projection stage, it is possible that we might have projection without simulation. Preventing unwarranted projections involves inhibition. In Goldman’s words,

Quarantine prevents something from happening that might otherwise occur; specifically, it prevents one’s own states from being projected onto the target. In neural terms, such prevention is inhibition. It might be described as “inhibiting the self-perspective”. If simulation is a major facet of third-person mindreading, successful mindreading should involve inhibition of the self-perspective (Goldman 2006: 170).

Goldman needs “inhibition” for his model to work. But he doesn’t actually provide an account of the development of inhibitory mechanisms. In the section of Simulating Minds on egocentrism and projection, he presents us with behavioral studies of egocentric bias that are “interpretable within the projection framework” (Goldman 2006: 165). In the next section, “The Neuropsychology of Quarantine”, he turns to a case study involving a stroke victim. Goldman informs us that, “someone impaired in the ability to inhibit the self-perspective should have trouble producing accurate mindreading. This is what ST predicts, and this prediction is dramatically confirmed in the case of a particular stroke patient” (Goldman 2006: 170). The damage done to this stroke victim was in a region of the brain

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3 “Given our definition of projection, taking a genuine state of one’s own and ascribing that state to another is clearly a case of projection. Is it a case of simulation-plus-projection? We might consider it a ‘limiting case’ of simulation-plus-projection, a case in which the simulation element is null but the projection element is robust” (Goldman 2006: 41).
that one study “highlighted as possibly sustaining the ability to inhibit one’s own perspective” (Goldman 2006: 171). So we have the case study of one patient (WBA), who is having problems inhibiting her own perspective, who has suffered damage to a region of the brain, a region which possibly has something to do with inhibiting one’s own perspective, according to another study. Goldman concludes from these two studies, “it is natural to infer that inhibition of self-perspective is a vital aspect of mindreading (Goldman 2006: 172).” Something like the inhibition of self-perspective may very well be a part of mindreading, but one case study and one study of a brain region isn’t solid evidence. At best Goldman has suggestive results that may point to a necessary condition, a part of the brain that needs to be functioning in order for x to happen, without an explanation of x. A mature theory of how inhibition develops is never presented. And such a theory would at minimum have to address what an effective, as opposed to “accurate”, simulation would mean in different cultural and social contexts, because what we inhibit is not simply a matter of how accurate, if that is the correct term, we need to be, but how effective we want or intend to be. To explore how the intention to be effective might complicate the picture for simulationists, let’s return to the first scene.

Recall that Conrad Hilton has asked Don to his hotel suite for some free advice and to test him. Don understands the game. He can’t simply give free advice if he is going to be seen as a valuable player. But he accedes to Connie’s request anyway. However, he does so only after lighting a cigarette and allowing himself a pregnant pause, as if to say, ‘ok, here is your advice, no effort involved’. If we interpret his response in terms of simulation, in evaluating the mock-ups Don would be placing himself in the shoes of prospective hotel

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4 Here is the key paragraph. “Of crucial importance, the evidence from WBA appears to demonstrate that the root of at least some egocentric errors in mindreading is failure to inhibit, or quarantine, self-perspective. This, of course, is precisely ST’s story. Because Samson et al.’s evidence about WBA, along with evidence from Vogeley et al. (2001), points to a particular brain region as responsible for this function, it is natural to infer that inhibition of self-perspective is a vital aspect of mindreading” (Goldman 2006: 172). Notice that he gives himself wiggle room at the start of the passage by qualifying the claim with an italicized “some”. By the end of the paragraph we have a more general (natural) inference: “inhibition of self-perspective is a vital aspect of mindreading”. Both of these remarks must be placed in the context of the manner in which he began the discussion. At the start of, “Egocentrism and Projection,” he states, “There is an extensive literature on egocentric biases in mindreading, and this section and the next one [“The Neuropsychology of Quarantine”] argue that these egocentric biases are best explained by the simulation-plus-projection model” (Goldman 2006: 164).

5 To make matters worse, instead of providing any further discussion of his own account of inhibition, Goldman then launches into how TT can not account for the finding of “widespread egocentrism” (Goldman 2006: 172-173).

6 In Simulating Minds Goldman also discusses evidence from childhood studies that suggest there is a connection between inhibitory control and performance on false belief tasks. “Problems with standard false-belief tasks are problems with inhibiting the first-person perspective (section 8.4), which should be distinguished from (problems with) adopting a third-person perspective” (292). He notes that there is a study that challenges the connection between false-belief task errors and inhibition. (To counter this study, Goldman appeals once again to the stroke victim.) To be fair to Goldman, there are other features of his model—for example, the inputs used for simulation—that could lead to problems that we associate with forms of egocentrism, in spite of the fact that he links projection and egocentrism in the sections of the book discussed above (see, note #4). However, these would be due to failures in the simulation stage, not to a failure to inhibit self-perspective, which is directly linked to the projection stage. It is the former, understood in terms of empathy, that will play an important role in considering the implications of ST for ethics, while the latter—that is, inhibition—tackles the question of impartiality.

It’s interesting to note that at the beginning of the discussion of egocentrism and projection, Goldman sidesteps the issue of when being influenced by one’s own “genuine” states is appropriate. “Projection occurs when a genuine, nonpretend state of the attributor seeps into the simulation routine despite its inappropriatness (as judged by information the attributor possesses). This results in an attribution that is inappropriately influenced by the attributor’s own current states (genuine, nonpretend states). I won’t try to settle the question of when, exactly, being influenced by one’s own genuine states is inappropriate” (Goldman: 2006: 165). I would be very curious to know what kind of answer to this question could possibly be envisioned from within his model.
guest(s) through imagination, and then after processing his pretend beliefs, he would project them back on to the target, the hotel guest. How would she react? She would be turned off to ads with mice.

Without going into the details of the theory theory versus simulation debate in any depth, I do want briefly to raise the issue here of which model might better explain Don’s reaction. According to Joe Cruz and Gordon,

What unifies theory theorists is the view that attributing inner states and making sense of the behavior of others is carried out by a capacity that deploys knowledge encoded in a theory. The most straightforward sense in which ST is opposed to TT is that simulation theorists deny that our capacity to attribute mental states is subsumed by a body of knowledge about the minds of others. Rather, our own mental processes are treated as a manipulable model of other minds (Cruz and Gordon 2005).

So perhaps Don didn’t simulate hotel guests at all. Perhaps he simply inferred, relatively quickly, from his knowledge of people and their aversions, that associating a hotel with a mouse is a bad idea. Since both Goldman and Gordon have conceded that we employ theory at times to read others, how are we to decide whether Don did so in this case? In this particular situation I submit that there is no way. He could have used theory or simulation or both. The interaction can’t tell us. How might we tell? Well, if you are a certain kind of cognitive scientist you will argue that different regions or networks of the brain may be involved if we are using theory instead of simulation to read a target.

However, what complicates our answer to this question is not only our limited knowledge of the brain but the complexity of the situation itself. If we go back to the scene, we will see that Don is never simply engaged in mindreading in relationship to a prospective hotel guest. He is also seeking to place himself in the best light in relationship to Connie. He needs an effortless and convincing answer. Perhaps there wasn’t any simulation or theory in play at all regarding the hotel guests. Perhaps it was all a show for Connie. Don has read Connie through his knowledge of men of a certain age and class background, etc., and/or he has read his facial expressions and body language, allowing him to simulate features of Connie’s emotional state. He concluded that any assertive answer was better than none. After all, Don had a strategic intention. His goal was not to mindread prospective guests but to convince Connie. Or possibly there wasn’t any theory or simulation involved in his response, only behavioral cues, ones that he may have been little aware of, but which still allowed him to make the call. Yet even if this was all that he was doing, he was in some sense taking the perspective of the other, although not through simulation or theory. His perspective taking might better be viewed as a form of interpersonal praxis, about which I will have much to say shortly. In any case, it is important to note that there was a strategic dance between Don and Connie, one that probably involved multiple sorts of interactions, some better understood in terms effective interaction rather than accurate simulation.

There is a group of social psychologists, several at Simon Fraser University, who have developed a neo-Meadian approach to agency, in part in response to TT and ST. At first it may be somewhat difficult to see just how they differ from the simulation theorists. There is an extraordinary emphasis in their framework on taking the perspective of the other, which can be framed in terms of stepping into the other guy’s shoes, an expression which

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8 Note that in spite of the ambiguities in the situation and alternative explanations, Don’s responses could still be interpreted in terms of simulation or theory by committed ST or TT theorists.
Goldman and other simulationists often use. And like the simulationists they often cite studies that show how infants are interactive and engage in incipient intentional behavior (e.g., gaze following) from an early age, that is, prelinguistically. But they don’t conceptualize our relationship to others in the same fashion. Here is how three of them, Jack Martin, Bryan Sokol, and Theo Elfers, frame the differences.

Whereas simulation and theory theorists tend to think about perspective taking in cognitive and mentalistic terms supported by neurophysiological mechanisms, we locate perspective taking, its emergence, and its development within the coordinated interactivity and conduct of infants, children, adolescents, and adults with objects and others in the biophysical and sociocultural world. For us, the development of our abilities to work with and through perspectives is not an instantiation or stimulation of preexisting mental concepts and structures. It is a situated, embodied, dynamic, and coordinated way of being and conducting ourselves with others and things that moves from a social, interactive to a psychological, intersubjective footing during ontogenesis. However, even with this graduated emergence of more advanced psychological aspects, perspective taking never loses its situated, embodied foundation. As we interact in a world of objects and others, our orientations are constantly shifting, forming, and transforming in interaction with the activities and orientations of others. It is within this ongoing interaction and coordination that the generative processes of our psychological lives are located (Martin, Sokol, Elfers 2008: 295-296).

Part of the difficulty in distinguishing the approach of the interactionists from that of the simulationists revolves around the phrase “taking the perspective (or role) of the other”. Simulationists such as Goldman tend to see this activity in terms of low-level mimicry and emotional contagion, or as an explicit attempt to predict how a target will respond using pretend-states, which appears to involve stepping into the other guy’s shoes. Mead incorrectly denied the sort of imitation that we find in infants and young children, an error that neo-Meadians do not make. But Mead does supply us with a distinction that is crucial here. For Mead, taking the perspective or role of the other can be seen as taking the attitude of the other. According to Gary Cook,

We can avoid some of the misleading connotations of the phrase “taking the role of the other” by using in its stead the alternative phrase Mead himself often employs, namely, “taking the attitude of the other”. An attitude, he says, consists of a behavioral disposition, a tendency to respond in a certain manner to certain sorts of stimuli, or the beginnings of an action that seek an occasion for a full release or expression (Cook 1993: 79).

When we see two boxers or fencers feinting and parrying, we might say that they are predicting the decision of the other in order to make a decision of their own. Yet, this is not the sort of decision state that allows time for determining the belief states of the opponent. Nor is there simple mimicry taking place. The opponents are taking the attitude of the other in order to respond. There is anticipation of the other but it is not reflective anticipation. So here we have an interactional state that requires a form of taking the perspective of the other but one that is not easily accommodated by the way in which either Goldman or Gordon describe simulation. Of course one can say that they are talking about simulation in terms of mindreading while I am now addressing another phenomenon. This would be a mistake. Much of what they take to be simulation is better described in terms of taking the attitude of the other. And by failing to see perspective taking in attitudinal terms, in addition to mimicry and explicit role taking, we drop out crucial resources for describing how agents navi-
gate social worlds. Further, why should simulationists be allowed to define how the phrase “taking the perspective of the other” is understood.

How might the neo-Medians’ approach cash out in relationship to ST? They would be much more interested in how the dynamic interaction of the agents is responsible for the ways in which they interpret the world and others. Of course this is not to say that there aren’t biological, theoretical, and “introspective” factors at play. It is to say that perspective taking, attitude taking, is a process that is in itself transformative. But just to make sure that there is no misunderstanding: the neo-Medians aren’t claiming that we don’t have well-settled habits and beliefs. If we didn’t, we wouldn’t be able to anticipate what others might say or do. However, we also know that our anticipations are modified in ongoing interaction, even if only to a modest degree, and this complicates the picture for the simulationists.9 Let’s turn to the third scene to clarify the differences further.

Pete, the young executive in Don’s agency, wants to sign American Airlines. He enters the university club where his colleague, Duck, is meeting with Shel from AA. Both Duck and Shel appear uncomfortable. Duck wants a deal but Shel isn’t moving in the right direction. Pete can see that Duck has not made much progress and he begins a traditional pitch: We really want your business and we are excited about the opportunity to work with you. But it’s not working. Then the young ad man says, my father was on the plane. Shel is clearly taken aback. But what is he thinking? He seems to know immediately that this piece of information is game changer. If you are a simulationist, you might say that Shel is already placing himself imaginatively in the mind of the young exec, and through recognizing the extent of his loss, he is in a position to hypothesize and conclude that Pete might have a unique vantage point from which to help repair the airline’s reputation. Or perhaps Shel cannot dismiss Pete because he is having a sympathetic reaction to his loss, that is, he is having an emotional response. Or perhaps both of these are occurring, that is, sympathy and simulation involving strategic calculation. But for our purposes the key to their interaction is that it is instigated by the shock of the unanticipated. Pete made a tactical decision to use his own tragic circumstances to get business 10. The airline executive thinks that he is reading Pete correctly when he starts his first traditional pitch. And then Shel is surprised, no, shocked by Pete’s revelation, and he has to recalibrate on hearing the news. But his new reading isn’t merely observational. It is attitudinal and interactive. And Pete is also modulating his presentation in reaction to Shel’s responses. Feint and parry. In this situation, all of the agents are recalibrating in light of a novel revelation. How often does someone tell you that his father has died in the plane of the company that you represent?

Although this scene involves an extraordinary revelation, the neo-Medians would argue that less dramatic intrusions of novelty regularly occur in our social interactions and that their approach is well suited to addressing these events. Novel situations help people learn to be adaptable and flexible, which in turn assists them in developing their capacity 9 While of course there must be constancy of beliefs and habits if we are to function with others, there must also be an ongoing assumption that others are not thinking or believing what we assume. This pragmatic fallibilism is built into interactions with which we are all familiar. When a parent says that she knows Johnny like the back of her hand in the morning, and then says in the afternoon, “that’s my Johnny, you can never figure out what he is going to do next,” we don’t accuse her of violating the laws of logic. The fact is that both things can well be true. Of course we can “predict” or anticipate what others will do but we also quite regularly fail at this. Much of the time we got it right enough to function reasonably well with others. And so-called failures to “mindread” should not be understood in terms of not reading a target properly due to lack of knowledge about inputs and outputs. People are not targets in this fashion. They are persons. As persons one of their leading characteristics is their ability to surprise us, in little ways, for example, that permit conversations to continue, and in big ways. 10 We don’t know if he knew in advance that he was going to raise his father’s death. He may have surprised himself by doing so, which raises another set of questions that we will let pass.
for taking more than one perspective at the same time—or to be more exact, at the practical and functional equivalent of “at the same time”\(^{11}\). And learning how to take more than one perspective “simultaneously” in turn allows us to grapple with novel situations. We have here a virtuous circle. As Jack Martin, Jeff Sugarman, and Sarah Hickinbottom note,

For Mead, sociality consists of the ability to occupy two or more different perspectives at the same time. The relation of an organism and an environment is continuously dynamic. The natural and social world consists of a multiplicity of perspectives, any one of which may enter into an organism’s field of activity. It is by virtue of the organism’s ability to be several things simultaneously, in the sense of taking up (acting within) two or more different perspectives, that the organism is able to deal with emergent events or novel, unexpected occurrences (Martin, Sugarman, Hickenbottom 2010: 123-124)\(^{12}\).

Recall that in at least three of the four scenes that have been described, multiple perspectives were potentially in play, and this more accurately comports with more of our social life than does the taking of the perspective of a specific other regarding a particular belief or emotion. Of course we do the latter but even when engaged with one person there is often a multiplicity of perspectives operative on the horizon, a horizon that we anticipate may shift due to novel reactions. In addition, much of our social life is group life. And here is where the ability to take multiple perspectives is most obviously in play. Without addressing this phenomenon or its implications our ethical reflections are impoverished. This impoverishment can be seen in the manner in which Gordon discusses the relationship between impartiality and empathy or sympathy.\(^{13}\) But before turning to Gordon, a few words on Goldman’s attempt to join ethics and empathy at the hip are in order.

In his 1993 article, “Ethics and Cognitive Science,” as well as in his 1992 presidential address to the Pacific Division of the APA, Goldman demonstrated that he was quite prepared to use the term empathy to describe forms of simulation. (Goldman 1993, 1992).\(^{14}\) In Simulating Minds we learn that in ethics empathy probably comes into play at both the level of compassion, care, and concern for the other and at the epistemic level, that is, through helping to clarify what the other may be experiencing (Goldman 2006: 298). Goldman does not claim that empathy can in and of itself make us moral, only that it can be an important component of moral practice if assisted by other tools. For example, one of the problems with focusing on empathy is the danger of parochialism, that is, we tend to be more empathic toward those who are more like us and spatially closer.\(^{15}\) To counter this we need to extend our empathetic sensibilities. Goldman uses what he calls enactment imagination, or E-imagination, to explain how we can counter parochialism. “To accurately E-imagine the situation of an anonymous and distant individual, it helps to receive detailed information about that person’s life experience and an image of her and her immediate environment. Thus, news coverage of ongoing wars, famines, and other catastrophes are more effective

11 By using the phrase “at the same time” here I do not mean to imply that multiple perspectives may not involve split second switches from one to the other. The phrase is meant to suggest the practical and functional reality of taking multiple perspectives at once.
12 The passage continues, “Because persons are themselves social, their perspective taking may be enhanced greatly by communication with others through significant symbols” (124).
13 Gordon does not make any systematic distinction between empathy and sympathy in the article that we will be discussing (Gordon 1995).
14 Portions of “Ethics and Cognitive Science” (Goldman 1993) are identical to the published version of Goldman’s Presidential Address to the Pacific Division of the APA (Goldman 1992).
15 The notion that similarity is a significant factor in how much empathy we feel for strangers has been questioned in an experiment involving age and occupation. See Batson, Lishner, Cook, and Sawyer (2005).
when they supply biographical details of selected individuals, as well as photographs or visual footage” (Goldman 2006: 297-298).

Heightening our empathic responses may play a role in altruistic actions. But presumably we must also defeat our egocentric biases. As we saw, Goldman appeals to the notions of quarantine and inhibition to explain how to keep egocentric biases in check. However, there doesn’t appear to be a connection between these mechanisms and the social development of the self or group dynamics. To his credit, Gordon seeks to tie our ability to distance ourselves from what could be called egocentric biases to our ability to become an other, that is, to a form of sociality, although his model limits his success.

In his 1995 paper, “Sympathy, Simulation, and the Impartial Spectator”, Gordon must confront a basic problem for his approach. Recall that for Gordon we transform ourselves into the other when we simulate. If transformation is truly successful, we in a sense become the other, as does the actor who is fully engaged in playing a role (Gordon 1995: 734-735). But if we become the other, then we lose the ability to evaluate the other critically, whether we are talking about ethics or other tasks, such as giving advice. How do we avoid falling into this trap? Gordon appeals to Adam Smith for assistance.

According to Smith, rather than simply respond to another’s pleasure with pleasure and to another’s suffering with suffering, we find ourselves turning our attention to the cause of the other’s emotion. We imagine ourselves being in the other’s situation, ourselves faced with whatever is causing the other’s emotion. Then, in imagination, we respond independently, in our own way, to the imagined cause (Gordon 1995: 741).

But although Smith is on the right track here he fails to make a distinction that Gordon deems salient, between what the other is experiencing and our own experience. To show this he quotes Smith.

As we have no immediate experience of what other men feel, we can form no idea of the manner in which they are affected, but by conceiving what we ourselves should feel in the like situation (Gordon 1995: 741).

For Gordon, simply imagining how we would feel would result in our transforming simulation into a form of projection, which would be deadly for his transformational model, and render it especially useless in making ethical evaluations. What does Gordon propose? We must distinguish “between just imagining being in X’s situation and making the further adjustments required to imagine being X in X’s situation” (Gordon 1995: 741). In other words, we must separate merely imagining being in someone else’s situation from imagining being that person in his or her situation. The latter can lead to an over-identification with the other. I in a sense become the other. The former—that is, merely imagining—allows us to still say, “If I were you, I would...”, with an implicit, “but I am also not you”, factored in. If we perform both of these operations, we can then compare our responses. In Gordon’s words, “If your response is the same in each case, approve X’s conduct; if not, disapprove” (Gordon 1995: 741). He goes no further with this analysis and moves on to the problem of self-judgment, to which we will turn momentarily. He seems to think that it is enough that he has provided us with a decision procedure. How a rift between these two imaginary states provides an impartial vantage point is never addressed. So in spite of the title of the

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16 Smith emphasizes different aspects of sympathy in The Theory of Moral Sentiments. We are not confined to our own feelings nearly as much as this quotation would suggest. See, for example, Smith 1976: 317.
article, with its promissory note of addressing impartiality, what Gordon appears to be offering us is a method for holding back so that we don’t immediately assent to the actions of others. Or as he has told us earlier, “unlike the explanation or prediction of behavior, moral assessment requires holding back” (Gordon 1995: 740). If we don’t hold back we may find ourselves flooded by the other’s emotion and unable to judge. But while the activity of holding back may be of assistance, it certainly doesn’t produce impartiality, even if we define the term generously17.

Gordon tells us that there is one problem with the analysis he presented regarding the decision procedure. How can we handle judging ourselves? We can’t use our own beliefs or conduct as we might when we judge someone else, for it is our own conduct that we may have to disapprove. Again, he turns to Smith for assistance and quotes the following passage from The Theory of Moral Sentiments.

> When I endeavor to examine my own conduct... I divide myself, as it were, into two persons; ... I, the examiner and judge, represent a different character from that other I, the person whose conduct is examined into and judged of. The first is the spectator, whose sentiments with regard to my own conduct I endeavour to enter into, by placing myself in his situation, and by considering how it would appear to me, when seen from that particular point of view. The second is the agent, the person whom I properly call myself (Gordon 1995: 741-742; Smith 1976: 113).

It’s obvious for Gordon that in simulating someone else I can “be out of sympathy with myself” (Gordon, 1995: 742)18. The problem for him is how can I distance myself from my own emotions and motivation when I am the spectator “with my selfsame emotions and motivation” (Gordon 1995: 742). In answering this question Gordon ends his article with the following words,

> It can happen only if the very process of becoming a spectator, and of coming to regard myself as an other, changes me. I believe that the process does change us, and that this was Smith’s contention, too. But the topic is a complex one: observing myself trying to argue the case in a paragraph or two, I see a lot of hand waving. So I will not try. Q.E.D. (Gordon 1995: 742).

Yes, too cute and clever by half. But Gordon was actually on to something here, although I cannot locate any place in which he followed up on this discussion. In response to Gordon’s words, a neo-Meadian would say: precisely, the process does change us. For example, an impartial spectator would never have arisen without the to and fro of perspective taking, although this is not the only condition19. Mead refers to the ability to place oneself between two perspectives, or systems, as sociality. And it includes the experience of being

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17 It’s worth noting here how Goldman and Gordon seem to have opposite problems: one worries about egocentric bias, the other about being overwhelmed by the emotions of the other. Nevertheless, in the end they have a similar weakness. They don’t have a developed account of the genesis of judgment as it emerges through social interaction.

18 As mentioned in footnote #13, Gordon does not systematically distinguish between empathy and sympathy in this article. For the most part this is not problematic given his goals. But note that when he uses the phrase “sympathy with oneself”, it would be difficult to replace it with “empathy with oneself”. The terms have different connotations in contemporary American English. Using “sympathy” in this context appears to help move Gordon’s argument along. The terms should be more carefully distinguished.

19 Psychopaths can successfully take perspectives and yet lack concern for others, in all likelihood due to emotional deficits (see, Goldman 2006: 293-294, and Prinz 2006: 32).
“caught” or suspended between one’s own perspective and that of another. This is indeed transformative and we learn how to do this as socially interactive or transactive persons. We are self and other, and can be both self and other. But ST, in either Goldman’s or Gordon’s versions, is not the best way to capture this interactivity because it is grounded in a model of subjectivity that views the self as requiring a bridge—whether it is one of emotional contagion, imagination, or theory—to overcome the self’s separation from the other. No doubt we employ these mechanisms in interacting but we don’t require them in the manner that Goldman and Gordon suggest.²⁰ Briefly here is how Mead and the neo-Medians would tell the story.

For Mead, the taking of the perspective of others is a condition for the possibility of self-consciousness and self-criticism. Through the reflexivity involved in linguistic interaction the capacity for perspective-taking is nurtured, although it certainly has proto-versions in the interactivity of infants. Specifically, Mead addresses the importance of the vocal gesture in setting the stage for the reflexivity that is made possible by role-taking. For neo-Medians there is a smooth trajectory from infant interactions through early symbolic interactions. In learning to speak one must be able to hear the other as one hears oneself. This proto-role taking sets the stage for taking the perspective of others in more complex social interactions that we call roles. In order to play roles, we must be able to take the position of the other, as well as our own, and invert them. This is a form of stepping into the other guy’s shoes but it is interactive from the get-go. As interactions increase we develop a capacity for taking multiple perspectives. Mead uses the game to illustrate this. If I am playing baseball, and I am the pitcher or third baseman, in order to play the game I must be able to take the perspective of everyone else on the team. Is this mindreading? Not as Goldman understands it. There may not be any introspection at all and yet I am engaged in multiple perspectives. Of course there can be introspection, especially when problems arise. But this phenomenon emerges out of my developing ability to take multiple perspectives. I “see” myself from different perspectives and the perspective of the whole, that is, the generalized other. The latter allows me to see myself or an aspect of myself, depending on how one is defining the self, as if I were the (generalized) other. For neo-Medians, the taking of multiple perspectives contributes to the development of what might be called an impartial spectator, although as a pragmatist, Mead would never view impartiality as a perfectly calibrated neutrality. There is no view from the mountaintop.

There is much that could be said here about how one can’t generate an impartial spectator from Gordon’s or Goldman’s models, as they stand. This not only has to do with the lack of interactivity in their approaches, which is one of the conditions for generating a sense of impartiality. It is because their models do not provide the tools for addressing how groups enter into our experience as a unique sort of third person, what Mead refers to as the generalized other. Most of the time when interacting in groups I do not simulate a group mind, that is, try to figure out what everyone is thinking or believing. I imbibe its patterns of behavior as I interact within the group. These patterns, which are akin to Bourdieu’s habitus, play a fundamental role in generating perspectives that transcend the self/other dynamic. In short, if we want to use the notion of empathy to develop a robust ethical theory, it seems that the problem of other minds is still setting the stage for the reflections of the simulationists, when it’s time to let the “problem” drift off into history, as Dewey would suggest.

²⁰ Sometimes simulationists sound as if they are trying to create a clear telephonic connection between the self and other. But a better metaphor for much of our social lives is the game telephone, in which the original input is rarely identical to the output, as each participant transforms, even if only slightly, the meaning intended in the first person’s words. Paradoxically, this suggests how close we are to the other, not how remote, when seen through the interactionist’s lens. It seems that the problem of other minds is still setting the stage for the reflections of the simulationists, when it’s time to let the “problem” drift off into history, as Dewey would suggest.
we need to see it in terms of sympathy and interactive perspective-taking\(^{21}\). Further, we need to view people as agents, not targets, who will behave unpredictably, and whose unpredictability is factored into their sociality by others. In this way we may avoid viewing empathy as an escape hatch for subjects seeking to break away from the similarly wired black boxes of their own minds.

**References**


\(^{21}\) In a forthcoming article (Prinz 2011), “Is Empathy Necessary for Morality?” Jesse Prinz responds to the question in his title with a fairly resounding, yet qualified, no. It is qualified because he leaves open the possibility that “empathic concern” may well play an important role in morality (Prinz 2011). I view Prinz’s piece as a corrective to exaggerated claims for what empathy can accomplish for moral actors, if by empathy we mean a kind of emotional vicariousness, which is what Prinz addresses. There is no doubt that “empathy” has been overplayed in popular, as well as some scholarly, literature of late. However, I would argue that Prinz in turn has overplayed his hand in this article. His definition of empathy is circumscribed; for example, he tells us that, “We cannot empathize with a group, except by considering each member” (Prinz, 17 online version). And his reading of the research appears weighted toward supporting his own model—which emphasizes the importance of non-empathic emotions, for example, guilt and anger—through undermining the role of a type of empathy in morality. Although, I tend to agree with him about the importance of some of the “emotions” he mentions, his model ends up offering us an either/or—empathy or his preferred emotions—in spite of a few caveats here and there that empathy may not be completely without value. He also dismisses in a rather cavalier fashion the merit of a cosmopolitan outlook, which he views in Kantian terms. I hope to address some of the limitations of Prinz’s approach in the future. His article is currently available on the web http://subcortex.com/ For an alternative view of cosmopolitanism, see, Aboulafia 2010.


Louis Quéré

Towards a social externalism: Pragmatism and ethnomethodology

Abstract. Ethnomethodologists have very often distorted G. H. Mead’s works, partly because they have read them through H. Blumer’s interpretations. Therefore they have undervalued many similarities existing between Mead’s and Garfinkel’s thoughts. Of course there are lots of ambiguities and problems in Mead’s writings, and ethnomethodologists are right when they criticize them. But they are wrong when they misread Mead. This paper examines two points. The first one is one about which Mead has often been misread: his use of the internal-external distinction with regard to mind and action. This use doesn’t aim at maintaining a psychological interiority, but at grasping motricity as a kind of intentionality. The second point is about Garfinkel’s respecification of one of Mead’s main leitmotiv: “taking the attitude of the generalized other”. Garfinkel’s respecification is done in A. Schütz’s terms: the attitude of the generalized other is internal to the “attitude of everyday life”, and the generalized other takes the form of that which is normal, i.e. of that which is “in accordance with the mores”.

Ethnomethodologists have long held an ambivalent attitude towards pragmatism, and especially towards George Herbert Mead, the most widely-read pragmatist author in the social sciences. On the one hand, they have seen in Mead’s work a precursor of the type of analysis that they have later referred to as “Mind in Action,” to take up the title of a not-so-recent book by Jeff Coulter (1989). On the other hand, they consider that Mead never entirely broke from a Cartesian conception of the mind, and has not managed to provide a correct analysis of the concept of “mentality”. However, these positions are evolving, as proven by a recent paper by Mustapha Emirbayer and Doug Maynard in Qualitative Sociology (Emirbayer & Maynard 2011). While ethnomethodology is in a position to provide an effective set of tools for pragmatism’s radical empiricism, the latter can, in the field of social-scientific inquiry, allow ethnomethodology to be something more than simply a further program for the study of social interaction and spare it from the technical tendencies that presently threaten it.

In what follows I will not tackle a subject as vast as this. I will simply attempt to shed light on an analytic orientation of ethnomethodology that it seems to share with pragmatism, which I propose to call “social externalism”. In order to do this, I will begin by discussing a critique of Mead’s work by the ethnomethodologists Jeff Coulter and Rod Watson, which does not seem to me to do full justice to Mead’s externalism. I will then go on to explain and highlight the social dimension of this externalism and compare it to that of Harold Garfinkel, the founder of ethnomethodology.

1 On the current state of ethnomethodology, see Livingston 2008; also the dossier published by Enrico Caniglia and Andrea Spreafico in Quaderni di Teoria Sociale, 11, 2011; On Garfinkel’s reading of the Pragmatists, see Ravis 2002; Emirbayer & Maynard 2011; Quéré & Terzi, 2011; Rawls 2011. For a general overview of ethnomethodology, see, among others, Heritage 1984; Livingston 1987; Button 1991; Lynch 1993.
Mead’s vulnerability

In their introductory article for a recent issue of Theory, Culture and Society on cognitivism, Jeff Coulter and Rod Watson (2008) criticize researchers who treat our “mental vocabulary” as if it provided labels for inner, unobservable phenomena (states of mind, activities, processes, etc.), and those who view “normative practices” such as interpreting, anticipating, and controlling as if they were operations or processes which are analyzable independently from their relation to the specific context by which they are occasioned. Drawing support from Wittgenstein’s philosophy of psychology, they recall that mental predicates are not names for processes in the mind or the brain, but person-level predicates. It is persons, and not parts that are internal to them such as the brain or the mind, who think, reason, understand, intend, etc. Furthermore, introducing categories such as ‘act’, ‘activity’, ‘process’, and ‘experience’ in order to account for these mental predicates takes us down the wrong path from the very beginning, because these are not the appropriate categories. Thus, “to understand” is not a verb of activity but of ability. In the same way, talking about the ‘mind’ is equivalent to talking about various human capacities and their exercise, which are observable, and especially about capacities which enable self-consciousness and self-reflection (see Bennett & Hacker, 2003).

Once we manage to expurgate the mentalistic characterization of much of our vocabulary of personal predication, we can begin then truly to grasp how it actually works. In cases where we can tell (e.g.) what someone thinks, how he has understood something, what he intends to do or what his motive is, we do so on the basis of scenic criteria of conduct and circumstances. In those cases in everyday life where we cannot tell what someone thinks, etc., we need, not access to anything “inner,” but rather, as Wittgenstein reminds us, to “more of the outer” (Watson & Coulter, 2008: 13).

In passing, Coulter and Watson attack Herbert Blumer, whose symbolic interactionist program, inspired by Mead, seems to them to be based upon a mentalist conception of human behavior, as suggested by the following quotation from Blumer’s book.

Symbolic Interactionism

The term “symbolic interaction” refers, of course, to the peculiar and distinctive character of interaction as it takes place between human beings. The peculiarity consists in the fact that human beings interpret or “define” each other’s actions. Their “response” is not made directly to the actions of one another but instead is based on the meaning which they attach to such actions. Thus, human interaction is mediated by the use of symbols, by interpretation, or by ascertaining the meaning of one another’s actions. This mediation is equivalent to inserting a process of interpretation between stimulus and response in the case of human behavior (Blumer, 1967: 78-79).

To introduce in this way an interpretation, qua mental operation, as a mediator of action is a problematic move, as is inserting an interpretation of the rule into the act of following that rule, as Wittgenstein has shown.

However, for Coulter and Watson, the problem stems not only from Blumer’s subjectivist and mentalist interpretation of Mead, but also from Mead himself:
Mead did much to open up “mind” to the warp and weft of ordinary social practice, and certainly made important moves towards the position whereby mind was conceived praxiologically, in terms of its publicity and transparency in action rather than in terms of its “privacy,” “interiority” or “indwelling” within individuals. He did, however, on occasion, continue to conceive of mind in the latter terms: again, his position is not entirely stabilized. Not only is there a continuing concern in his work with evolved biological bases, but also with a psychological interiority. Thus he wrote of an “inner conversation” or “inner dialogue” between the “I” and the “Me,” of “Self-indication,” the imaginative “taking the role of the other” (…) We see here in Mead’s work (…) a range of problems attendant upon the failure to entirely abolish the internal-external distinction with regard to mind (Watson & Coulter, 2008: 7-8).

Is this diagnosis correct? Mead unquestionably made abundant use of the internal/external distinction. But did he do so in order to uphold a mentalist conception of the mind? Unquestionably, he conceived of thought as an inner conversation. But is it between the I and the Me, and is it to explain behavior in terms of some “psychological interiority”? For example, in his theory of the act, Mead distinguished between an “inner phase” and an “external phase” of behavior, and indeed, he did not resist the temptation to anchor the former in the brain. But did he conceive of the act as being controlled from the inside by some subjectivity? Finally, does he see the adoption of another’s attitude as an operation of the imagination?

Unquestionably, Mead’s position on these issues is far from being clear and stable in all its points. For example, when he defines thought as an “inner conversation”, he presents thinking as talking to oneself while assuming the role of the other, or of the community as a whole. In doing this, he fails to analyze the phenomenon properly: thinking is not ‘talking’ to oneself, we do not need to talk to ourselves when we think; however, we can only think what we can also express in words or through other media (for example through art). But this is not the center of Mead’s argument. His main idea is that thought, like reflective intelligence, results from the internalization of a mechanism of organizing behavior which is situated in the social process as a whole, more particularly in communication, and not in the individual’s psychological interior. It is the mechanism of assuming the attitudes of others, those of the “generalized other” or of the common perspective, in the coordination of acts, gestures, and words. These, then, are the processes of an “external social organism” that lend their structure to human thought. Furthermore, contrary to the assumption of Coulter and Watson, adopting others’ attitudes is not taken as an operation of the imagination, because in Mead’s conception, this process is anterior to the emergence of thought and imagination. It is this process that permits the development of the ‘self’ and the ‘mind’. The questions that we may well ask, however, when confronted with this kind of explanation are these: Should we trace our mental capabilities, which involve the mastery of techniques, back to mechanisms? Furthermore, doesn’t Mead introduce, in his theoretical explanations, shadowy entities that often just push back the problems that they are supposed to solve?

The same difficulties arise in the analysis of ‘self-consciousness’, a problem that haunted Mead throughout his life. Being self-conscious does not imply being conscious of one’s ‘self’ as a carrier, subject, or owner of the experience. Neither does it mean to dispose of an image or concept of oneself. These are interpretations that Mead rules out from the very beginning. Rather, it means to respond to one’s “generalized habitual responses”, or to the attitudes and impulses on which they depend, which means being conscious of the fact of standing ready to react in a such and such a way to such and such a stimulus. But the idea of self-consciousness remains ambiguous, and to consider, as Mead seems to do, that
self-consciousness can arise before language has been acquired, presents some difficulties. Indeed, according to Mead, the individual acquires a first form of self-consciousness as soon as the self appears in its experience as a conduct-organizing mechanism. The individual acquires a self when relating and reacting to himself as if it were an object in the environment, via the mechanism of self-affection (affecting oneself through gestures that are addressed to others) and via the assumption of the attitude of the other. This explanation still seems to be entirely informed by the notion of ‘self-reflection’.

In the following I would like to accomplish two tasks. The first is to correct Coulter and Watson’s interpretation of Mead’s supposed “internalism”, and the second is to reestablish links between Mead’s thought and ethnomethodology. Too often, ethnomethodologists have identified Mead with Blumer and symbolic interactionism, which they struggled against, usually with good reason. However, they have not done justice to Mead’s work, and have thus closed themselves off from certain insights, for example concerning the nature of the social act or the primacy of the social process – two points that I will discuss when bringing the approaches of Garfinkel and Mead into contact.

**Mead’s externalist “internalism”**

Coulter and Watson are right to underline the pregnancy of Mead’s distinction between ‘internal’ and ‘external’, as well as its ambiguities. However, what they don’t notice is that Mead’s “internalism” is a crucial component of his “externalism” and a centerpiece of his “social behaviorism,” which makes it all the more significant. This is very apparent in his analysis of the internal and external phases of the act.

Mead’s starting point is a criticism of John B. Watson’s behaviorist psychology. His main criticism is that Watsonian behaviorism makes an important part of the act disappear under the pretext that it is not observable, and psychologizes it in order to get rid of it. What Watson causes to disappear is the “internal phase” of the act. For Mead, however, this phase is not psychological, although it happens inside of the organism: it is not different in nature from the external phase. In short, Mead proposes to consider the act in its entirety, and to show how most external, observable processes are prepared in the organism, or rather how they originate in the organism:

What the behaviorist does, or ought to do, is to take the complete act, the whole process of conduct, as the unit of conduct. In doing that he has to take into account not simply the nervous system but also the rest of the organism (Mead, 1934: 111).

There are multiple aspects to the Meadian problem of the “complete act”. At least four can be discerned. The first concerns the distribution of the act over the interior and exterior of the organism. The second aspect is the role played by the interruption of the act — which is not completed — in perception and in the emergence of thought, reflection, and choice as means of controlling behavior. The third aspect corresponds to the distribution of the social act among multiple agents, and the fourth to the participation of objects, especially physical objects, in the completion of the act. (In order for an act to be successfully completed, the “resistance of things” is necessary, which resistance involves an activity in the object which is of the same nature as the one that takes place in the organism. The organism produces the response in the object that its act tends to call up, and adopts its attitude in order to produce its own future responses to the object).
It is necessary to first deal with the possible misinterpretations of the terms ‘act’ and ‘internal phase’. ‘Act’ calls to mind a punctual event. When we speak of an act, it generally means that we have converted a course of action or an activity, which is an event including other events, into an object of thought, which is discursive in nature – “an event-with-meanings”, as Dewey would say. Yet for Mead, as for all pragmatists, experience is not structured by discourse; it is not primarily cognitive/discursive, but “behavioral”, that is it is a matter of conduct or behavior in an environment. An act is also an ongoing event that consists of stimulation and response and the results of the response. Back of these lie the attitudes and impulses of the individual which are responsible for his sensitiveness to the particular stimulus and for the adequacy of the response (Mead, 1938: 364).

It is in the act that the relation between organism and environment, as well as the nature of their transactions, are determined.

In addition, the expression ‘internal phase’ of the act makes us think spontaneously of anything that motivates and directs the act, and which is usually situated in the category of the ‘mental’ or ‘states of mind’ – from beliefs, desires, intentions and volitions, through ideas, images, reasoning, exploration and deliberation, to consciousness and self-consciousness. This is not at all what Mead situates in the internal phase of the act. He does not include intentions and volitions, consciousness and reflection, reasoning and deliberation. In fact, for him, even in immediate experience – that is to say experience that does not involve consciousness, thought, or reflection – the act necessarily also has an internal phase.

Of course there are processes in the organism which take place in the “central nervous system” and which are not observable. However, if they are supports, those processes are not on the same level as that which constitutes the matter of the internal phase of the act. The latter can be called psychological, but only in a very limited sense of that term:

The psychological datum is best defined, therefore, in terms of accessibility. That which is accessible, in the experience of the individual, only to the individual himself, is peculiarly psychological. I want to point out, however, that even when we come to the discussion of such “inner” experience, we can approach it from the point of view of the behavior, provided that we do not too narrowly conceive this point of view. What one must insist upon is that objectively observable behavior finds expression within the individual, not in the sense of being in another world, a subjective world, but in the sense of being within his organism (Mead, 1934: 5).

So what are we dealing with, if it is neither psychological states or events, nor neuro-physiological processes? How to conceive the “internal phase” of the act without making it either something mental or subjective, or something purely psychological? The answer can be found in the passage that follows the previous quotation:

Something of this [objectively observable] behavior appears in what we term “attitudes”, the beginning of acts. Now, if we come back to such attitudes we find them giving rise to all sorts of responses. The telescope in the hands of a novice is not a telescope in the sense that it is to those on top of Mount Wilson. If we want to trace the responses of the astronomer, we have to go back into his central nervous system, back to a whole series of neurons; and we find something there that answers to the exact way in which the astronomer approaches the instrument under certain conditions. That is the beginning of the
act; it is a part of the act. The external act which we do observe is a part of the process which has started within; the values which we say the instrument has are values through the relationship of the object to the person who has that sort of attitude (ibid.: 5).

This passage reveals a recurrent and very problematic confusion in Mead’s writing, which has been pointed out very accurately by Coulter and Watson. Mead equates what is going on in the organism to what is going on in the “central nervous system”, and places the organization of the act in the latter. While it is undeniable that the act in its totality involves neural processes, it is obvious that Mead is trying to describe something other than these when talking about the “internal phase” of the act. The description of this phase requires a different vocabulary, as is shown by the usage of concepts such as ‘attitude’, which does not pertain to the vocabulary of neurophysiology. While attitude is not a neurophysiological process, it is not a psychological state either. The nature of attitude is “behavioral”, because attitude is the beginning of an act. To assume a certain attitude therefore means to be poised to act in a certain way, to be poised to do various things, or to execute various acts, or parts of acts, in relation to objects that are to be handled, or when confronted with situations to resolve. We thus order and arrange the various awakened attitudes in a way so that they do not conflict with each other. An attitude is not observable the way a concrete behavior is, but if the attitude is the beginning of an act, which determines what will follow after what immediately happens, the attitude, as it is present in behavior, is of the same nature as observable conduct.

Mead offers various examples to illustrate what he means by ‘attitude’ and “beginning of an act”. One of these is the previous example of the astronomer on Mount Wilson who, when approaching the telescope, is poised to act very differently than the novice who has not yet acquired the skills to use the instrument properly. Another example appearing in many of Mead’s writings is the example of the hammer:

If one approaches a distant object one approaches it with reference to what he is going to do when he arrives there. If one approaches a hammer one is muscled all ready to seize the handle of the hammer. The later stages of the act are present in the early stages – not simply in the sense that they are all ready to go off, but in the sense that they serve to control the process itself. They determine how we are going to approach the object, and the steps in our early manipulation of it. (…) The act as a whole can be there determining the process (ibid.: 11).

The same example is taken up again in Philosophy of the Act in order to illustrate what an attitude is (unfortunately, with the same tendency to associate it with the brain):

Thus in reaching a hammer we already have in the organism the attitude of striking with the hammer. If now there are present in the experience not only the visual stimulus to reach for the object but also the characters of the object which initiate the response of striking with the object, we have excited those nervous elements which are responsible for the beginning of this later act in its co-ordination with the earlier phase of reaching for the object. Also there enters into the experience what is called the imagery of the result of the response. We feel the hardness of the hammer handle and something of its balance in the hand before we actually get it into the hand (Mead, 1938: 130).

Assuming an attitude means to initiate a movement, to begin an act while tacitly projecting its totality, especially its last phases, its final point, and to use this tacit projection in order to control the accomplishment of the gestures. ‘Attitude’, as conceived by Mead, thus
presents the characteristics of projection, operativity, and effectiveness, which Dewey, in *Human Nature and Conduct*, attributes to ‘habit’. The attitude can take various forms, notably include ideas, under the condition that a pragmatic definition of the idea is adopted. This is what Mead explains in one of his last published texts, “A pragmatist theory of truth”:

Symbols are in truth the appropriate stimuli of our attitudes. Attitudes are the responses which are present in our behavior either in advance of the stimulation of things, or, already aroused, yet await the occasion for their full expression. In the first case they may appear as ideas or concepts, in the second as the meanings which constitute things. The concept of a book is the organization of attitudes, which, given the stimulus, will express themselves in reading, writing, borrowing, drawing, buying or selling the book. They are all there in the dispositions of men, as forms of conduct which await the appropriate spring to call them out (Mead, 1929: 336).

Four observations can be made about this citation. First, this time, the attitudes are located in conduct, and not in the central nervous system. Second, there is a plurality of attitudes: we are poised to act in different ways, to do a series of things, to produce various responses in relation to an object – this preparation is included in every phase of the various acts. A selection is therefore necessary. Third, there is a difference between attitudes and effective responses: the latter are manifest, while the former are not; it is necessary to select stimuli in order to pass from the former to the latter. Finally, the fourth observation concerns the assimilation of ideas, concepts and significations/meanings into habitual responses to an object and into dispositions to act in different ways towards it. Ideas enter into conscious experience in the form of organized attitudes to which the organism responds, that is to say

as attitudes or organized responses selecting characters of things when they can be detached from the situations within which they take place. Particularly do our habitual responses to familiar objects constitute for us the ideas of these objects (Mead, 1932: 97).

This is why ideas constitute an important part of the human environment.

Where does this lead us? Mead’s internalism appears as the centerpiece of the behaviorist psychology that Mead sought to set in opposition to that of Watson. As we have seen, this internalism has its ambiguities, especially when it comes to simultaneously using two mutually untranslatable vocabularies: that of the description of action in ordinary language, which is the basis of the concept of attitude, even in its redefined form; and that of neuro-physiology. It is possible to partially dissolve these ambiguities if we reformulate Mead’s intuitions from a more phenomenological perspective: what Mead discovers in his analysis of the internal phase of the act are the phenomenon of “motor intentionality” and the projection capabilities of the lived body (“corps propre”), and here especially the way in which the body actively addresses itself to objects and events. From this point of view, a number of Mead’s intuitions actually anticipate those that Merleau-Ponty would later develop in his analysis of the dynamism of the body, as has sometimes been noted. Far from designating neural processes alone, this dynamism involves an original intentionality, namely motricity, which gives things a motor meaning and generates a type of practical knowledge that Merleau-Ponty calls *praktognosie* (‘practognosis’). The goal of Mead’s reflection is to bring out this dynamism of the body and this form of intentionality in the analysis of the act. Of special importance is the inclusion of a kind of non-representational projection of the act in its
Is "taking the role of the other" imaginative?

A second correction of Coulter and Watson's proposition seems necessary: to talk of "the imaginative 'taking the role of the other'" suggests that Mead has the imagination acting as a mediator of interaction and communication, just as Blumer has interpretation acting as mediator of the organization of behavior. Here, too, Mead's way of putting things is a source of confusion, as could be seen in one of the citations above, where he includes "the imagery of the results of the response" as a component of the attitude. But if, as Mead postulates, the mechanism of adoption of another's attitude is located in behavior, it does not possess the mental character that it would possess if it required imagination. This mechanism appears well before the emergence of mental processes.

For Mead, this mechanism has its origin in a very early phase of social communication: he supposes that vocal gestures arose within the conversation of gestures. In his theory, it is thanks to the vocal gesture, through which the utterer affects himself in the same way that he affects the recipient, that individuals are able to begin reacting to their own acts just as recipients react, to stimulate themselves while also stimulating the other, and to project into their environment their own tendencies to respond or their organized responses. From the moment when the responses provoked from both sides have converged, the conversation of gestures was able to advance to a level where the gestures acquire a shared meaning. In Mead's conception these processes are anything but mental: the conversation of gestures can do without representation, reflection, and imagination. The explanation for this is similar to that given in the case of attitudes. A gesture is the beginning of an act that calls for and indicates a possible continuation in another gesture, the second responding to the first by projecting the accomplishment of the act, as well as its result. As soon as a gesture indicates to someone how to continue, this gesture has meaning, which in turn is provided by the response that interprets it in the form of an act.

Here is how Mead explains the objective nature and threefold character of meaning:

Meaning is (...) a development of something objectively there as a relation between certain phases of the social act; it is not a psychical addition to that act and it is not an "idea" as traditionally conceived. A gesture by an organism, the resultant of the social act in which the gesture is an early phase, and the responses of the organism to the gesture, are the relata in a triple or threefold relationship of gesture to the first organism, of gesture to second organism and of gesture to subsequent phases of the given act; and this threefold relationship constitutes the matrix within which meaning arises, or which develops into the field of meaning (Mead, 1934: 76).

As shown here, nothing indicates that Mead considers the assumption of the attitude of the other as a mental phenomenon which requires imagination, much to the contrary:

I think it can be shown that selves do belong to [an objective phase of experience which we set off against a psychical phase] (...), which we distinguish from our imaginations and our ideas, that is, from what we term psychical. The evidence for this is found in the fact that the human organism, in advance of the psychical experiences to which Cooley refers, assumes the attitude of another which it addresses by vocal gesture, and in this attitude addresses itself, thus giving rise to its own self and to the other (Mead, 1930a: 704).
This “operation” takes place in behavior, more precisely in communication, which is partly a social process. It is in communication where society, selves, minds, and what Mead calls the “psychical”, come into existence:

In the process of communication there appears a social world of selves standing on the same level of immediate reality as that of the physical world that surrounds us. It is out of this social world that the inner experiences arise which we term psychical, and they serve largely in interpretation of this social world as psychical sensations and percepts serve to interpret the physical objects of our environment (ibid.).

In an earlier text Mead evokes two major phases in the development of communication:

Communication is a social process whose natural history shows that it arises of cooperative activities, such as those involved in sex, parenthood, fighting, herding, and the like, in which some phase of the act of the form, which may be called a gesture, acts as stimulus to others to carry on their parts of the social act. It does not become communication in the full sense, i.e., the stimulus does not become a significant symbol, until the gesture tends to arouse the same response in the individual who makes it that it arouses in the others. The history of the growth of language shows that in its earlier stages the vocal gestures addressed to another awakens in the individual who makes the gesture not simply the tendency to the response which it calls forth in the other, such as the seizing of a weapon or the avoiding of a danger, but primarily the social role which the other plays in the cooperative act (Mead, 1927: 76).

Here we witness the appearance of the “social role”, a term Mead used frequently. However, he does not distinguish between “taking on the role of the other” and assuming his attitude. This is why, in addition to the many undesirable connotations of the concept of role in sociology, it is preferable to use the second expression. Assuming the attitude of the other means activating in one’s behavior a tendency to respond to a certain kind of stimulus as the other would respond. Gary A. Cook reminds us that Mead considers this “operation” to be very productive:

(1) it underlies the acquisition of significant symbols; (2) it makes possible the inner dialogue of human thought; (3) it is the behavioral mechanism by means of which the individual achieves self-consciousness; (4) it is responsible for the development of the social structure of the human self or personality; (5) it provides the principle of distinctively human social organization; (6) it enables the human individual to participate in a world of public or shared objects; (7) it is responsible for our everyday perceptual experience of distant objects as entities having “insides” and as existing contemporaneously with those objects that are within our grasp; (8) it yields the capacity to occupy and compare in thought different spatio-temporal perspectives (Cook, 1993: 92).

If Coulter and Watson’s judgment on Mead’s errors is therefore in part justified, it still does not do justice to Mead’s externalism, a component of which is the motor intentionality of the body. Mead often underlined the corporeal character of the selves, and gave an important place to contact and touch in his theory of perception. However he never extended his analysis of the internal phase of the act to an explanation of the nature of the relation of the lived body (“corps propre”) to the world, maybe because of his tendency as a psychologist to place the organization of conduct in the central nervous system.
The sense of “normality” as common perspective

I will now focus on pointing out the social character of Mead’s externalism, the central idea of which is that the self, the mind, the mental and self-consciousness are given rise to by the social process. As this social externalism is also an essential aspect of ethnomethodological “doctrine”, it seems pertinent to bring the approaches of Garfinkel and Mead into perspective – not, however, without taking certain precautions. In his early writings, Garfinkel defined his externalism in the following terms:

I shall exercise a theorist’s preference and say that meaningful events are entirely and exclusively events in a person’s behavioral environment, with this defined in accordance with Hallowell’s usage. Hence there is no reason to look under the skull since nothing of interest is to be found there but brains. The “skin” of the person will be left intact. Instead questions will be confined to the operations that can be performed upon events that are “scenic” to the person (Garfinkel, 1963: 190).

If there is one point where Mead and the ethnomethodological approach converge, it is in the affirmation of the primacy of society and the fundamentally social character of human conduct (the logical order of Mead’s argument is: Society, Self and Mind, and not the reverse). Coulter and Watson base their critique on a Wittgensteinian interpretation of ethnomethodology, which focuses on dissipating conceptual ambiguities and on correcting category errors that underlie questioning and analysis in the humanities and social sciences, notably as concerns the study of mind and cognition, and the use of a “mental vocabulary”. It must be admitted that, viewed from this perspective, Mead’s undertaking seems eminently vulnerable in multiple respects.

However, while justified, a Wittgensteinian reading of ethnomethodology is not the only conceivable reading. It is also possible to consider that ethnomethodology has indirectly reformulated certain of Mead’s intuitions, rendering them more plausible and transforming them into objects of empirical study. I say “indirectly” because Garfinkel, if he read Mead at all, did not reference him – much to the contrary. Initially, Garfinkel attempted to find a solution to problems that he found in Parsons’ action theory, while drawing on insights from various phenomenological perspectives (Husserl, Gurwitsch, Schütz, Merleau-Ponty).

From Garfinkel’s point of view, the Meadian enterprise seems without a doubt an immense but unjustified theoretical construction, populated with ghostly entities and processes that were produced by a fertile imagination but that are ultimately incapable of describing social phenomena in their radical concreteness. Garfinkel’s objective is neither to naturalize the mind, the senses, or the form of social organization that we live in, nor to explain the formation of self-consciousness. He thus stands much closer to William James than to Mead, especially when explaining why it is necessary to avoid the venerated practices of theorization, establishing models and constructing ‘ideal types,’ or when criticizing the substitution of concrete phenomena with abstract, imagined entities when trying to talk about them. Nevertheless, Garfinkel tacitly takes up and reformulates a number of Mead’s intuitions, for example when describing the functioning of practical reasoning or of common sense knowledge of social structures. This is not entirely surprising when one considers that he had initially been influenced by Alfred Schütz, who had incorporated various pragmatist analyses into his social phenomenology. Garfinkel neither talks about assuming the attitude of a generalized other, nor about adopting the common perspective, but he describes similar processes when explaining the functioning of the ordinary grasping of
events, when describing the role of reference to normality in common-sense judgments, or when describing the functioning of Durkheian social objects.

There exists, in the ordinary grasping of objects and events in the environment, or in the ordinary grasping of situations, as Garfinkel describes it, an adjustment to the anonymous point of view of “everyone,” without this being the bringing into play of an underlying mechanism of attitude assumption. Relying on Schütz, Garfinkel shows that the condition for an event to belong to a “known-in-the-manner-of-common-sense-environment” is that “its features are not assigned as matters of personal preference but are to be seen by anyone” (Garfinkel, 1967: 56) (the “are to be seen” designating a quasi-moral obligation). In addition to “the determinations” attributed to the event (and to the immediate reactions that it evokes), the preferences, expectations, orientations, or values offended by the event, required as a matter of “objective necessity,” are considered as attributable to everyone who is a “bona fide member” of the same community of language and practices. Therefore, the reactions that the event evokes are endowed with a character of normality, and thereby also with a character of obligation.

For Garfinkel, the sense of normality designates the form that the social perspective takes in the organization of conduct. “Sense of normality” is to be read not only as the way that things usually happen in relations and in the factual dimension of social life, but also as a sense of how things should and must happen (the normative and axiological dimension). In particular, the sense of normality with regard to situations, practices and social relations comprises a moral sense of the reasons for facts, norms, and values that underlie this normality, that is to say a sense of how they are justified. It is therefore tied closely to a determinate conception of the social and moral order. This sense of normality and the corresponding vision of social and moral order are at the same time prescriptive and hermeneutic: they are prescriptive in the sense that they establish obligations; they are hermeneutic insofar as they serve to identify and interpret reality.

This sense of normality implies that conduct and practices are animated and directed by ideas, conceptions and beliefs – after all, people understand at least a minimum of what they are doing and what they see others do, and this understanding involves ideas, or more precisely a particular type of ideas, namely anonymous and impersonal ideas that pertain to practices and social institutions. It is precisely because certain impersonal ideas are constitutive of practices and institutions that these ones make sense for their “members”. C. Castoriadis and C. Taylor call this the “social imaginary.” While Garfinkel does not use the term “social imaginary,” what he describes as “a legitimate order of beliefs about life in society seen ‘from within’ the society” (Garfinkel, 1967: 54) corresponds quite well to Castoriadis and Taylor’s expression.

Building on Schütz’s analytical sketches of the structures of the Lebenswelt, and especially on the opposition that he established between the “attitude of daily life” and the “attitude of scientific theorizing”, Garfinkel described the functioning of the sense of normality in a relatively precise manner in chapters 2, 3 and 5 of Studies in ethnomethodology. For the ordinary man, the social and moral order primarily manifests itself in the normal character of situations of everyday life, that is to say in their conformity to normative background expectations and legitimate beliefs about social life. Where we find order, we find behavior appearing as familiar forms that are normatively expected and identifiable for what they are, because they are endowed with organization, they are standardized, and they correspond to what everyone could or would do under the same circumstances, and so on. From this point of view, members don’t meet society as an object of thought – as a represented or imagined order, a conceptualized totality, a personality of higher hierarchical order, or as a
discursively asserted collectivity of belonging – but, much more prosaically, as the standar-
dized, reproducible and normal character of concrete figures drawn in conduct and in ac-
tivities of ordinary scenes of social life. The “normality”, which cannot be grasped from
outside of a situation of commitment, is therefore essentially a morally motivated confor-
mity to an assumed order which is defined by mores and institutions, habits and customs:
“For the *bona fide* member ‘normal’ means ‘in accordance with the mores’”. Normality
functions simultaneously as an interpretive pattern, as the content of normative background
expectations, as guide when configuring behavior (in production as well as in reception), as
regulator of social affects, and as a linchpin for the construction of justifications.

Here is how Garfinkel introduces this perspective in chapter 2 of his work, which is de-
voted to the routines of everyday life:

A society’s members encounter and know the moral order as perceivedly normal courses
of action – familiar scenes of everyday affairs, the world of daily life known in common
with others and with others taken for granted. They refer to this world as the “the natural
facts of life” which, for members, are through and through moral facts of life. For mem-
ers not only are matters so about familiar scenes, but they are so because it is morally
right or wrong that they are so. Familiar scenes of everyday activities, treated by members
as “the natural facts of life,” are massive facts of the members’ daily existence both as a
real world and as the product of activities in a real world (Garfinkel, 1967: 35).

In the organization of their activities and exchanges social actors shape their conduct
according to the constitutive expectations of the “attitude of everyday life” as a morality.
The “attitude of everyday life” pertains to “morality” insofar as it implies a morally moti-
vated adherence to the “natural facts of life in society,” that is to say, an adherence to cu-
rent beliefs, mores, habits, and customs. This is why it is possible to say that members of
society act and interact in a situation of commitment. Their commitment is not only a bias
in favor of certain facts, definitions, standards, norms, values, or beliefs, but also a conces-
sion of authority and validity: the members accept the jurisdiction of these facts, norms,
etc., over themselves, and over what they do – but also over what they see – because they
are convinced, for reasons that are exempt from doubt, that they merit their adherence.
Thus, the “natural facts of life” are “socially-sanctioned-facts-of-life-in-society-that-any-
bona-fide-member-of-the-society-knows” (*ibid.*: 76). This means that they are not only va-
lid for members directly engaged in the production of an activity, but for *anyone*. Adhe-
rence to these facts expresses itself in phrases such as “this is how we do it,” “this is how
we usually do it,” “this is how it’s done,” “you can do that”, “you don’t do that”, “this is
how things are normally done, how they ought to be done, or how they must be done”, etc.

Obviously, the adherence in question is not the result of a deliberation on the member’s
part, and most certainly not the result of a critical examination of what Habermas calls
“claims to validity” that are put forward for factual or normative propositions, or that are
laid by traditions. The presuppositions on the basis of which we make sense of situations
that we are experiencing are not, strictly speaking, objects of knowledge or objects of dis-
course. As M. Polyani says, “we may be said to dwell in them” (Polyani, 1958: 60).

The sense of “normality” thus appears as an essential element of mediation in the con-
stitution of the behavioral environment which is society. In fact, the determination of the
basis of inference and required action to deal with a situation, to coordinate with others, to
adjust to circumstances, or to compose with the objective conditions of the environment is
precisely based on the “motivated” admission of these “natural facts of life in society” (life
in society viewed “from the inside of society”), as assumed to be known and admitted by everyone.

The social order that the members of society experience is therefore inseparably cognitive and normative at the same time. The social order, as experienced by the agents, provides them with cognitive resources, that is to say at the same time with ideas, conceptions, definitions, beliefs and knowledge (the “common sense knowledge of the facts of social life”), and with means to understand, interpret, explain, justify, and describe reality. But cognition is not separated either from normativity or from morality. If it is true that people refer to “common sense knowledge of the facts of social life” as a set of “natural facts of life,” and if they understand, interpret, describe, explain the events and situations on the basis of such a reference, it is fair to say there is indeed a “morality of cognition” (Heritage, 1984). Yet, this morality is not only valid for agents who are carrying out an activity, but also for those who observe it and who are compelled to recognize it for what it is. In addition to this, common sense knowledge does not separate facts and values – much to the contrary. In cognition, not only intellectual certainties are at work, but also moral commitments that attribute value, price and authority to the “natural facts of life”, to taken for granted definitions of reality, and to the “common sense knowledge of social structures”.

Using a vocabulary essentially borrowed from social phenomenology, Garfinkel expresses the idea that social agents perceive, feel, think, interpret, reason, and so on, in terms of an institutionalized social reality:

Common sense knowledge of the facts of social life for the members of the society is institutionalized knowledge of the real world. Not only does common sense knowledge portray a real society for members, but in the manner of self-fulfilling prophecy the features of the real society are produced by persons’ motivated compliance with these background expectancies (…). Seen from the person’s point of view, his commitments to motivated compliance consist of his grasp of and subscription to the “natural facts of life in society” (Garfinkel, 1967: 53-54).

Garfinkel provides various illustrations of this socially instituted character of knowledge of the world. One of these deals with the use of “institutionalized features of the collectivity as a scheme of interpretation.” In an experiment that simulates the situation of asking, giving and receiving advice, people were invited to make sense of the “yes”/“no” answers (which in fact were determined in advance) given to the questions that they asked. “Make sense” here essentially means to attribute a “reasonable” character, to assign “perceivedly normal values” while referring to “institutionalized features of the collectivity as a scheme of interpretation”. The argument is also more generally valid for most ordinary interactions:

Subjects made specific reference to various social structures in deciding the sensible and warranted character of the adviser’s advice. Such references, however, were not made to any social structures whatever. In the eyes of the subject, if the adviser was to know and demonstrate to the subject that he knew what he was talking about, and if the subject was to consider seriously the adviser’s descriptions of his circumstances as grounds of the subject’s further thoughts and management of these circumstances, the subject did not permit the adviser, nor was the subject willing to entertain, any model of the social structures. References that the subject supplied, were to social structures which he treated as actually or potentially known in common with the adviser. And then, not to any social structures known in common, but to normatively valued social structures which the subject accepted as conditions that his decisions, with respect to his own sensible and realistic grasp of his
circumstances and the “good” character of the adviser’s advice, had to satisfy. These social structures consisted of normative features of the social system seen from within, which, for the subject, were definitive of his memberships in the various collectivities that were referred to (ibid.: 92-93).

Another enlightening illustration is Garfinkel’s study of the practical accomplishment of gender in the case of a transsexual, Agnes. In the chapter of Studies in Ethnomethodology accounting for this study, Garfinkel describes the functioning of the “common sense knowledge of the facts of social life” in relation to the question of gender. From the common sense perspective, the population is divided into two types of individuals when viewed from the angle of sexual composition: on one side, natural males and females, on the other side, persons who are morally different – the “incompetent, criminal, sick and sinful” (ibid.: 122). Garfinkel specifies that this is the definition of “a real world of sexed persons,” a world that is viewed as a “legitimate order”, “as a matter of objective, institutionalized facts, i.e. moral facts” (in the sense that these facts give rise to moral, and not only intellectual, convictions). According to such a definition, to which everyone is expected to adhere as a matter of course when dealing with others, “the presence in the environment of sexed objects has the feature of a ‘natural matter of fact’”:

This naturalness carries along with it, as a constituent part of its meaning, the sense of its being right and correct, i.e., morally proper that it be that way (...). Hence the bona fide member of the society, within what he subscribes to as well as what he expects others to subscribe to as committed beliefs about “natural matters of fact” regarding distribution of sexed persons in the society, finds the claims of the sciences like zoology, biology and psychiatry strange. These sciences argue that decisions about sexuality are problematic matters. (...) I have stressed several times that for the bona fide member “normal” means “in accordance with the mores.” Sexuality as a natural fact of life means therefore sexuality as a natural and moral fact of life (ibid.: 123-124).

There is thus, from the perspective of ethnomethodology, not only an immediate manifestness of the social order and social structures to be found in familiar scenes of everyday life and in their “social settings” – it is not necessary to wait for them to be rendered visible by scientific objectification – but also an immediate availability of this order and these structures as practical resources, for both identification, comprehension and description of these scenes, and for the structuring of practical accomplishments. This immediate availability is in a way conditioned by the specific filter of the constitutive requirements of common sense knowledge. However, this availability is only immediate in situations where operations that actively organize behavior are taking place, which makes it different from that which society shows as an object of discourse or of scientific observation. It means that society operates, when engaged in such active operations, as a medium, or more precisely as a purveyor of schemes of interpretation and organization, orientations and norms, models and standards, with the instituted ideas and meanings that are part of it. This availability also shows that society is not to be distinguished from these operations – hence the validity of the expression that Garfinkel occasionally used: the “workings of immortal ordinary society”.
The primacy of the social in Mead’s writings

Mead conceptualized the primacy of the social very differently: he presents both an observation and a theoretical construction. An observation: no living organism can exist alone and isolated from others: “All living organisms are bound up in a general social environment or situation, in a complex of social interrelations and interactions upon which their continued existence depends” (Mead, 1934: 228). The bulk stimulation of behavior is provided by reciprocal actions of the members of these groups. The development of the “vital process” of society as organism (as Mead occasionally puts it) requires “social acts” involving multiple individuals, and the organization of social cooperation brings into play very different mechanisms, depending on the type of society. In short, the social process is first of all factual. Any behavior is inevitably social because it takes place in a context of coexistence, association and interdependence, and because individual acts are but one phase in a more widely behavior, that of the social whole. This means that to be complete, the acts of individuals require the acts of other individuals.

However, for Mead the primacy of the social is simultaneously a theoretical construction: it is in the social nature of experience in a group, and in the structure of the social act that results – a social act which varies depending on the social forms of cooperation and coordination – that the mechanism which, through communication, enabled the rise of the higher form of organization of behavior which is the reflective control of behaviors. This is the mechanism of assuming the attitude of a generalized other:

I have my own doctrine for this social character of experience (…) What it amounts to in a very summary formulation is that society exists in the social nature of its members, and the social nature of its members exists in their assumption of the organized attitudes of others who are involved with them in cooperative activities, and that this assumption of organized attitudes has arisen through communication (Mead, 1929: 341).

The primacy of the social is therefore not only the primacy of the “social act,” but also the primacy of social and institutional habits, since, as Mead writes, it is in institutions that individuals “find the organization of their own social responses.” In fact, institutions essentially are established organizations of responses, or “complexes of social habits.” Among society’s institutions, language is the most fundamental one. Like any other institution, language can be characterized as an organization of responses or attitudes that are specific to a society, to the extent that it is a means to produce the different parts of an integrated social act:

The significant symbol is nothing but part of the act which serves as gesture to call out the other part of the process, the response of the other, in the experience of the form that makes the gesture. (…)The symbols as such are simply ways of calling out responses. They are not bare words, but words that do answer to certain responses; and when we combine a certain sort of symbols, we inevitably combine a certain set of responses (Mead, 1934: 269).

As we have seen, Garfinkel approaches the primacy of the social from a completely different perspective. While he attributes the same function to institutions, and the same role to the implantation of the social perspective into behavior in the form of a sense of normality, Garfinkel’s conception of the primacy of the social is much more durkheimian. He conceives of sociality as tightly interwoven with morality. (It could also be added that his de-
scription of the self-organization of “social settings” develops a motif which is very similar to that of pragmatism: the operational contribution of the environment to the organization of experience.) At the same time, it is the operations and accomplishments of the members of society that Garfinkel sees as the foundations of the edifice of the social and moral order.

In his early writings, Garfinkel took up Schütz’s question of intersubjectivity as well as his analysis of the structures of the Lebenswelt: the “stability of concerted actions” is produced through intersubjective operations between the individuals, with the operations being normatively regulated and socially organized. In a later phase he proposed a different version of the primacy of the social, namely viewed from the angle of the “social object”.

In the context of this last point, too, a connection can be made between Mead and Garfinkel. Mead used and abused the term “social object,” at times ascribing very different meanings to it. For Mead, the self is a social object, partly because it arises through interaction and because it incorporates the attitudes of others, especially the perspective of the group. Institutions such as property are also “social objects,” as are shared values and meanings, or as are persons. The only instance where Mead uses the term somewhat more precisely is in his theory of the social act. The social object is the meaningful whole that controls the execution of a complex act distributed over multiple agents. It is therefore, in a certain way, the form of the act as a whole (Mead uses examples such as team plays or economic exchanges). The form is an entity of order and meaning. It organizes and binds together the different parts and corresponding roles of the complete act, thereby also giving a direction to the whole. At the same time, the form transcends the participants of the act and their individual performances, and gives the whole a normative and objective character, in part because the form corresponds to an institution or an instituted practice. Mead says of this “social object” that it has to be present in the experience of every participant of a social act in order to produce the proper responses, which are connected to the responses of the others, and to control their performances. In this sense it has also a structuring effect on the situation. The modality of its appearance is not clearly stated. In certain instances, the social object refers to society as a whole: it is the common object generated by the presence of all in the experience of everyone, the object that ensures social control in a society of selves.

Garfinkel’s social object is just as transcendental and objective, and it also controls the situation and conduct of individuals, albeit in a different manner, namely through normativity and morality – two aspects that Mead rarely speaks of. It is through the individuals’ operations and accomplishments, which are supported by legitimate beliefs as well as habits and customs, that the social object acquires the status of being simultaneously transcendental as well as objective, authoritative, and obligatory.

For Garfinkel, the paradigmatic example for the social object is the “formatted queue”. When lining up in order to wait to gain access to a service, the participants generate, through their effective conduct and reasoning – finding, taking, and keeping their place in line, maintaining the direction of the line, advancing, staying at the right distance, etc. – not only a physically observable order but also a normative environment to which they submit themselves. They are exteriorizing the normative reference and thereby giving it an independent existence. By assigning it a transcendental status, they attribute a regulatory and obligatory power to an order that they themselves create and make visible (as well as being accountable, and able to be cited in support of an evaluation, complaint, incrimination, etc.) through their attitudes and conduct. The constraints of this order are directly felt by the people who create it. By displaying attitudes and conduct that are in conformity to the relatively vague normative expectancies which the physical order generates, the individuals are attesting their conformity to something that they do not consider as depending on them-
selves. Nevertheless, they are its very source, but they identify it as being exterior to themselves, and recognize it as obligatory and having authority, based on legitimacy or moral desirability. On the other hand, it is through this social object that, on the basis of established and socially approved practices, they are able to produce things together, and to control their actions and contributions to the whole. It is the prime example of what Garfinkel (2002) calls a “Durkheimian social object”:

The social object seems to stand above, or to be greater than, the actions of its production cohort. (…) And that object is a moral object through and through; it is right and proper that the object – the formatted queue, for example – is the way that it is. It is a moral fact of life and the actions of its local production cohort are moral or immoral actions, like butting-in-line (…). The actions of a social object’s production cohort are constrained by the object that that cohort is itself accountably producing (Livingston, 1987: 82).

To conclude

Ethnomethodology has much surpassed Mead’s intuitions on a number of points, and, from the point of view of the social sciences, fleshed them out in a much more satisfying manner. Is this a reason to send Mead’s works to the shelves of second-hand bookstores? Can his work still guide our inquiries? Obviously, it all depends on what we are looking for. If, for example, we want to retrace the natural history of the mind, communication or human society, we will find in Mead’s works a wide spectrum of stimulating conjectures that will fuel our investigations. The same is true when trying to fend off the subjectivist narrowing-down of the concept of experience in modernity as recalled by R. Koselleck (1988).

In relation to ethnomethodology, Mead’s argument carries a potential that deserves to be underlined. The functioning of common sense under the aspect of normality, as Garfinkel has described it, seems to be immune to all innovation, contestation or transformation: it never transcends the order of the membership collectivity. It is a decidedly conservative version of common sense, and quite opposed to the very spirit of a democratic society, if the latter is understood as opening up the possibility of never-ending questioning and as the removal of the landmarks of certainty. Mead’s common sense is not closed in this way; the common perspective introduced in conduct, in order to organize and control it, is not limited to a particular group or collective. This common perspective is by definition more open to a more universal generality, built on the intersecting of unrealized possibilities in the present order:

A human being is a member of a community and is thereby an expression of its customs and the carrier of its values. These customs appear in the individual as habits, and the values appear as his goods, and these habits and goods come into conflict with each other. Out of the conflict arise in human social experience the meanings of things and the rational solution of the conflicts. The rational solution of the conflicts, however, calls for the reconstruction of both habits and values, and this involves transcending the order of the community. A hypothetically different order suggests itself and becomes the end in conduct. It is a social end and must appeal to others in the community. In logical terms there is established a universe of discourse which transcends the specific order within which the members of the community may, in a specific conflict, place themselves outside of the community order as it exists, and agree upon changed habits of action and a re-statement of values (Mead, 1930 b: 404).
Mead thus presents us with an analytical hold on the political dimension of social experience that ethnomethodology has never managed to provide.

**References**


James Johnson

*Between Political Inquiry and Democratic Faith: A Pragmatist Approach to Visualizing Publics*

**Abstract.** In the post-War decades political science in the United States has been animated by two seemingly incompatible aims. On the one hand, the discipline is committed to scientific inquiry interpreted in largely positivist terms. On the other hand, the discipline aspires to generate knowledge that might improve democratic politics. I start by sketching pragmatist interpretations of social and political inquiry, of democratic politics, and of how the two are related. Problems of complexity and visibility emerge as central to those interpretations. I then indicate how Edward Tufte’s theoretical analysis of data graphics and the visual politics of the aids activist group ACT UP offer examples of how it is possible to envision complex social and political phenomena in ways that might sustain a democratic relation between inquiry and politics.

**Introduction**

For the past half century or so political science in the United States arguably has been characterized by two aims that stand in considerable tension. On the one hand, American political scientists have aspired to generate knowledge that might inform democratic politics and governance. On the other hand, they have sought after a brand of political science conceived along vaguely positivist lines. The political consequences of this tension are troubling.

Repeatedly, successive schools in American political science have been caught between desires for research that affirms and assists meaningfully democratic self-governance and desires for research that develops full causal accounts of politics, usually on a model from the natural sciences. The tension arises in part because such causal accounts tend deterministically to deny any consciously self-directed agency to the phenomena they study. A science of human political behavior thus can seem to debunk the self-understandings of democratic participants and the meaningfulness of their conscious choices. Much of the apparently most “scientific” work in political science has carried such a debunking message, intentionally or not. Sometimes democratic commitments have been made to appear foolish in light of the ignorance of voters, the apparently inescapable power of economic, military, and professional elites, and the decisive role of technological, economic, demographic, linguistic, geographic, and climatic forces largely beyond conscious human control. Political scientists have implied that effective governance, if possible at all, requires scientific skill and empirical knowledge beyond the grasp of most citizens. Hence the assignment of extensive governmental powers to experts (like social scientists) has been made to seem preferable. These positions have frequently been advanced in highly techni-

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1 I presented a much earlier version of this paper to a seminar in the Political Science Department at The University of Florida. I thank Larry Dodd for arranging that opportunity and all those who attended for their comments and skepticism. I thank Susan Orr for very extremely helpful comments on a more recent version.
cal language impenetrable to most citizens, who may therefore decide that politics is beyond them (Smith 1997, 256-7).

In what follows I suggest that this enduring tension reflects an overly narrow and pervasive, if often tacit, positivist conception of the tasks of social and political research. I will identify some of the tools at hand – in particular, data graphics - that, approached in a pragmatist fashion, might significantly mitigate the tension between scientific legitimacy and political relevance. In doing so I do not fully characterize an alternative pragmatist conception of inquiry. I merely suggest that a pragmatist approach might significantly mitigate the tension that informs contemporary political science.

Stacking the Deck?

A skeptical reader might object at the outset that invoking pragmatism simply is a way of embracing one side of the predicament I’ve just sketched. For pragmatists often ground their commitment to democratic politics precisely in a confident – some might claim, naïve – estimation of common individuals and their capacities. This is evident, for instance, in Dewey who asks:

For what is the faith of democracy in the role of consultation, of conference, of persuasion, of discussion, in formation of public opinion, which is in the long run self-corrective, except faith in the capacity of the intelligence of the common man to respond with commonsense to the free play of facts and ideas which are secured by effective guarantees of free inquiry, free assembly and free communication (Dewey 1939, 242)?

But it is true as well of more recent pragmatists. So, for instance, Roberto Unger begins a recent political manifesto like this:

The World remains restless. It has not despaired of finding a better way to fulfill the central promise of democracy, which is to acknowledge the constructive genius of ordinary men and women (Unger 2009, vii).

Yet not all pragmatists readily embrace the democratic faith Dewey and Unger articulate. One need only think of Richard Posner (2003) among avowed contemporary pragmatists to see that this is so. But one also can identify pragmatists who apparently demur from the “democratic faith” much earlier on. In “The Fixation of Belief,” for instance, Peirce (1877) lays out four ways of settling our beliefs in the face of problematic experience and the sort of doubt it generates. As is well known, he sketches the “method of tenacity”, the “method of authority”, the “a priori method,” and the “method of science,” arguing for the superiority of the latter relative to the other three. There is no need to recount his argument in detail here. It is instead important simply to note that Peirce is especially concerned about the method of authority – which consists basically in various coercive means of imparting and sustaining political and theological orthodoxy. He concludes despairingly: “The method of au-

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2 My own diagnosis of this tension suggests that, to a considerable extent, our contemporary predicament reflects the complex, distinctive ways that positivism inflected the discipline of political science in the United States in contrast to the way the discipline formed in other countries. The details of this historical process are beyond the scope of the present paper. For relevant background see Hauptmann, 2005 and Adcock and Bevir 2010.
authority will always govern the mass of mankind”). The distance between Peirce’s pessimistic assessment and the “faith” pragmatists from Dewey to Unger express seems especially great insofar as Peirce explicitly depicts the method of authority as an invitation to social, religious and political oppression (Peirce 1877, 16-18, 23).

Peirce’s frank political pessimism – and it is unavoidably political insofar as the problem of fixing belief plagues not just individuals but communities and that the allure of the method of authority represents what Peirce (1877, 23) calls “the path of peace”, albeit a coercively policed one, for any such community - might take some contemporary pragmatists by surprise. For something of a local consensus exists among contemporary pragmatists that their philosophical commitments regarding, say, meaning, knowledge or truth, have literally no political implications. Peirce likely would have found that stance puzzling. After all, he depicts widespread inability or unwillingness to embrace the pragmatist commitments of fallibilism, anti-skepticism, and consequentialism embodied in the scientific method as conducing to authoritarian politics. There is, then, some reason to see him as committed to the converse claim, namely that those who endorse those commitments are thereby committed too to an anti-authoritarian politics.

Regardless of whether Peirce – actually or hypothetically – would draw such an inference, Dewey surely did. He insisted, for example, that if “the pragmatic idea of truth has itself any pragmatic worth, it is because it stands for carrying the experimental notion of truth that reigns among the sciences...over into political and moral practices” (Dewey 1911, 110). He subsequently depicted this imperative as the culmination of a more general shift in the locus of cognitive and intellectual authority in modern societies.

Dewey believed that this shift had largely been accomplished in many domains of human endeavor, especially those dealing with the natural world. In that respect he differs from Peirce whose assessment was clearly much less sanguine. That said, Dewey complained that “men” have proven reluctant to make this change when it comes to confronting social, economic and political problems. And he saw this reluctance itself as a political problem, the resolution of which is central to the emergence of a robust democratic order.

Pragmatists from Peirce onwards have understood that processes of resolving doubt and establishing reliable belief reside “not in the individual merely, but in the community” (Peirce 1877, 16). Yet, in general, pragmatists have paid insufficient attention to the institutional arrangements necessary to coordinate and sustain those processes. Had they done

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3 Peirce issues this as much as an accusation as a description: “For the mass of mankind, then, there is perhaps no better method than this. If it is their highest impulse to be slaves, then slaves they ought to remain” (Peirce 1877, 23, 18).


5 This is a recurrent complaint in The Public & Its Problems (Dewey 1927, 101, 169, 175). Compare his subsequent remarks on the displacement of religious authority by science (Dewey 1934, 31–2, 74f). One might argue that subsequent developments make him look overly sanguine. But Dewey would reply that the resurgence of religiously based conviction is, in large part, a symptom of our failure to persevere along the path of inquiry.

6 Compare: “But in fact, knowledge is a function of association and communication; it depends upon tradition, upon tools and methods socially transmitted, developed and sanctioned. Faculties of effectual observation, reflection and desire are habits acquired under the influence of the culture and institutions of society, not ready-made inherent powers” (Dewey 1927, 158).
so, they might have noticed not just Dewey’s profession of “faith”, but also the crucially important caveat that he places on his commitment to the democratic ideal. As Dewey insists:

Democracy is a personal way of life controlled not merely by faith in human nature in general but by faith in the capacity of human beings for intelligent judgment and action if proper conditions are furnished (Dewey 1939, 242, stress added).

And those conditions, as Dewey made clear in the passage I cited earlier, consist in institutional arrangements that can provide “effective guarantees of free inquiry, free assembly and free communication”. In other words the pragmatist view of knowledge, truth, and meaning – properly philosophical concerns – entails in a more or less direct fashion a concern for political institutions. That is a consequence that pragmatists have left woefully unexplored. And it is not one I will explore here in any general way. For present purposes I instead wish simply to point out that the pragmatist approach I endorse (and to which I refer above) does not so much focus on the “intelligence of the common man” or “the constructive genius of ordinary men and women” in the abstract as on the institutions and practices necessary to sustain the full exercise of that intelligence or genius. This focus, I suggest, will allow us to mitigate the tension that characterizes much of contemporary political science.

Within this broad terrain I adopt a quite particular focus, namely on the resources available for communicating the specialist knowledge that emerges from social and political research. I am hardly the first to devote attention to this topic. Dewey indeed spends the latter chapters of The Public & Its Problems arguing that enhanced and elaborated institutions and practices of social inquiry and especially the communication of the results of that inquiry are crucial tools for remedying the problems besetting publics in the contemporary world. Likewise – and inspired by Dewey - Phillip Kitcher (2006) has more recently sketched the outlines of such an institutional arrangement – what he calls an Inquiry-and-Information System (IIS) – and sketches too the ideals that should inform the way that system operates. In complex modern societies, he claims, the components of an IIS are charged with disseminating as well as with generating and certifying information and ideas. And a set of ideals – significance and transparency – govern our assessment in any given society both of the components of the IIS as it currently exists and operates and the aspirations of those who inhabit that society for how they might be refined or augmented. By focusing not just on how our practices of inquiry generate reliable knowledge but also on how such knowledge is disseminated, this line of pragmatist thinking offers a remedy to the too narrow conception of social and political research that I noted at the outset.

**Envisioning Complexity as a Political Problem**

On a pragmatist view “science, like politics, is problem solving” (Rorty 1998, xxi). This does not mean that either practice can be derived from or reduced to the other. It

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7 I have done so at length elsewhere. See Knight and Johnson (2007; 2011).
8 For a more general depiction of science as a problem solving activity see Laudan (1981). And for a recent disagreement on whether social inquiry is properly characterized in problem solving terms see the exchange between Shapiro (2004) and Norton (2004). Shapiro defends a “problem driven” conception of inquiry in contrast to at the “method driven” approach he believes dominates much of political science. As is common with conceptual fashions in the discipline, this one risks being inflated into a dichotomy that will stymie rather than further...
means only that, ideally, they are informed by an overlapping family of commitments. We might read *The Public and Its Problems* as a sustained attempt to navigate the troubled entanglement of politics and inquiry in contemporary society. Indeed, Dewey explicitly claims that the basic problem confronting inchoate publics in contemporary America is an “intellectual” one that might be mitigated by finding more useful ways by which scientific, and especially social scientific, inquiry can enter into and inform democratic politics.

Nothing I have just said implies that pragmatists embrace the vaguely positivist conceptions of inquiry that informs much political research. In a well-known passage from *The Public and Its Problems* John Dewey offers the following observation:

> The prime condition for a democratically organized public is a kind of knowledge and insight which does not yet exist. In its absence, it would be the height of absurdity to try to tell what it would be like if it existed. But some of the conditions which must be fulfilled if it is to exist can be indicated. We can borrow that much from the spirit and method of science even if we are ignorant of it as a specialized apparatus. An obvious requirement is freedom of social inquiry and of distribution of its conclusions (Dewey 1927, 166).

From there Dewey proceeds to discuss the various intellectual and institutional obstacles that he sees blocking the emergence of this as yet non-existent mode of knowledge. As he makes clear, however, the emergence of systematic, ongoing social inquiry is important not so much for its own sake but for its political consequences, for its anticipated impact on the formation of democratic publics. I do not aim to discuss this larger topic here. Instead, I want to focus on how and where Dewey concludes his discussion.

One aspect of the matter concerns particularly the side of dissemination. It is often said, and with a great appearance of truth, that the freeing and perfecting of inquiry would not have any especial effect. For, it is argued, the mass of the reading public is not interested in learning and assimilating the results of accurate investigation. Unless these are read, they cannot seriously affect the thought and action of members of the public; they remain in secluded library alcoves, and are studied and understood only by a few intellectuals. The objection is well taken save as the potency of art is taken into account. A technical high-brow presentation would appeal only to those technically high-brow; it would not be news to the masses. Presentation is fundamentally important, and presentation is a question of art. A newspaper which was only a daily edition of a quarterly journal of sociology or political science would undoubtedly possess a limited circulation and a narrow influence. Even at that, however, the mere existence and accessibility of such material would have some regulative effect. But we can look much further than that. The material would have such an enormous and widespread human bearing that its bare existence would be an irresistible invitation to a presentation of it which would have a direct popular appeal. The freeing of the artist in literary presentation, in other words, is as much a precondition of the desirable creation of adequate opinion on public matters as is the freeing of social inquiry (Dewey 1927, 182-3).

While contemporary pragmatists have devoted considerable attention to the topic of social and political inquiry, to the best of my knowledge those discussions neglect almost completely the crucial importance Dewey assigns here to matters of dissemination and understanding just insofar as it neglects the extent to which science progresses by surmounting methodological problems.
The argument I sketch in this paper is an initial (read tentative, speculative) effort to spell out some consequences of that neglect. It is perhaps best to start by offering an expansive rendering of Dewey’s claims. Read narrowly, the passage I’ve just invoked would restrict our concern to “literary” matters. I think that would be a mistake. And I think there are at least two reasons Dewey and more contemporary pragmatists should avoid making it.

In the first place, Dewey himself invites an expansive reading by speaking nearly immediately of the role of “art” more generally. He observes that “The function of art has always been to break through the crust of conventionalized and routine consciousness”. Putting aside the question of whether that is an accurate characterization of the role art in fact has played in society (which I seriously doubt), he is here speaking not just of literary genres but of art per se. With respect to the dissemination of inquiry, he then goes on as follows:

The highest and most difficult kind of inquiry and a subtle, delicate, vivid and responsive art of communication must take possession of the physical machinery of transmission and circulation and breathe life into it. When the machine age has thus perfected its machinery it will be a means of life and not its despotic master. Democracy . . . is a name for a life of free and enriching communication. It had its seer in Walt Whitman. It will have its consummation when free social inquiry is indissolubly wedded to the art of full and moving communication (Dewey 1927 183, 184).

It seems clear that Dewey would countenance an expansive reading of his claims about art as including not merely literary, but visual media. There is, regardless, nothing in his discussion to preclude such a reading.

Second, it is crucial to recall that Walter Lippmann - arguably Dewey’s primary interlocutor when he wrote The Public and Its Problems - was especially concerned with vision, with the capacity, or lack thereof, that ordinary men possess to see political phenomena 10. Lippmann opens The Phantom Public with the following passage:

The private citizen today has come to feel rather like a deaf spectator in the back row, who ought to keep his mind on the mystery off there, but cannot manage to keep awake. He knows he is somehow affected by what is going on. Rules and regulations continually, taxes annually, and wars occasionally remind him that he is being swept along by great drifts of circumstance.

Yet these public affairs are in no convincing way his affairs. They are for the most part invisible. . . . He lives in a world that he cannot see, does not understand and is unable to direct (Lippmann 1927, 3-4).

Lippmann, of course, is in many ways charitable toward his fellow citizens. He thinks they have plenty of good reasons not to focus on public affairs. Citizens rightly are otherwise preoccupied with their jobs and families and other concerns considerably closer to home. That, though, is a matter of motivation, of where our interests might most commonly lie. Lippmann nonetheless is quite clear that public affairs are complex and so obscure in their own right. It is, on his account, simply very difficult to see the social, political and

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9 Recent discussions of social and political and social inquiry from a pragmatist vantage point include Knight and Johnson (1999), Topper (2000), Festenstein (2001), and Johnson (2006).
economic relations in which we are enmeshed and this, he thinks, is an invitation to partiality.

Modern society is not visible to anybody, nor intelligible contiously and as a whole. One section is visible to another section, one series of acts is intelligible to this group and another to that (Lippmann 1927, 32).

About this Dewey would hardly disagree. Here is his familiar diagnosis of the “the eclipse of the public” in modern democracies.

Indirect, extensive, enduring and serious consequences of conjoint and interacting behavior call a public into existence having a common interest in controlling these consequences. But the machine age has so enormously expanded, multiplied, intensified and complicated the scope of the indirect consequences, has formed such immense and consolidated unions in action, on an impersonal rather than a community basis, that the resultant public cannot identify and distinguish itself. And this discovery is obviously an antecedent condition of any effective organization on its part. Such is our thesis regarding the eclipse which the public idea and interest have undergone. There are too many publics and too much of public concern for our existing resources to cope with. The problem of a democratically organized public is primarily and essentially an intellectual problem, in a degree to which the political affairs of prior ages offer no parallel (Dewey 1927, 126).

A few pages later he elaborates on this view, tying the “intellectual” problem he has identified into the difficulties that complex modern interactions pose for members of inchoate publics who might try to perceive how important, enduring, indirect consequences generate their common interests.

The local face-to-face community has been invaded by forces so vast, so remote in initiation, so far-reaching in scope and so complexly indirect in operation, that they are, from the standpoint of the members of local social units, unknown. Man, as has been often remarked, has difficulty in getting on either with or without his fellows, even in neighborhoods. He is not more successful in getting on with them when they act at a great distance in ways invisible to him. An inchoate public is capable of organization only when indirect consequences are perceived, and when it is possible to project agencies which order their occurrence. At present, many consequences are felt rather than perceived; they are suffered, but they cannot be said to be known, for they are not, by those who experience them, referred to their origins. It goes, then, without saying that agencies are not established which canalize the streams of social action and thereby regulate them. Hence the publics are amorphous and unarticulated (Dewey 1927, 131).

Members of a public, in other words, often will feel their predicament without accurately recognizing its causes or consequences. The difficulty they confront revolves around visibility, around being able to see their common predicament as a first step toward addressing it in a concerted way¹¹. The failure to adequately confront that difficulty results, on Dewey’s view, in apathy, ideological bluster, emotional reaction and, generally, misdiagnosis of the public and its problems.

It is important to be clear here. I am not claiming that Dewey and Lippmann are, after all, agreed in their assessments of contemporary democracy and its vicissitudes. They are

¹¹ This, of course, might well involve finding ways either to sustain certain sorts of indirect consequences that they deem beneficial or to mitigate consequences they deem negative.
not\footnote{12}. Where Lippmann, for instance, emphatically endorses a technocratic solution for what he takes to be the malaise of democracy, Dewey rightly castigates that proposal as utopian, denying that it is either warranted or likely to succeed\footnote{13}. Rather, I am seeking only to establish that despite their political divergence, both theorists identify problems of complexity and visibility as obstacles to democratic politics\footnote{14}. That, I believe, affords initial warrant for the argument that follows.

**Tools For Revealing Complexity**

I want to take up the problem of visualizing complex social, political and economic phenomena. Such phenomena are in many cases aggregate ones. Political scientists have increasingly addressed the uses of graphical representations for analyzing quantitative data and for conveying the results of their analyses to professional audiences\footnote{15}. These valuable and innovative studies tend to focus rather narrowly on the methodology – the “nuts and bolts” as it were – of constructing this or that sort of graphic. They also tend to be concerned with communicating with other social scientists or, perhaps, with members of the legal profession or policy-makers. I want to shift the focus somewhat in order to highlight several theoretical premises that, I think, sustain these studies and that may prompt us to adopt a more expansive view of our potential audience. In this way it may be possible to see how the visualization of complexity – especially as it is embodied in aggregate phenomena – is a key route by which political inquiry can enter more effectively into democratic politics.

My initial focus is on the work of Edward Tufte, himself a lapsed political scientist, who has explored with great insight the cognitive and aesthetic tasks of communicating quantitative information\footnote{16}. Tufte clearly operates precisely at the junction of visibility and complexity. He emphatically punctuates the epilogue to the first of his books on the topic as follows:

\begin{quote}
First, I will note that the matter hardly has been settled in the favor of ‘realists.’ The authors of one recent review insist that “despite ongoing concerns about the ignorance and irrationality of voters, a growing body of recent work shows that the average citizen may be more informed than initially thought” (Wlezien and Soroka 2007, 812).
\end{quote}

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Second, and more ambitiously, a pragmatist might sidestep the entire debate as it is currently framed. She might instead challenge the presumption that survey instruments as typically deployed are a reliable means of ascertaining public opinion or knowledge on political matters. For an argument of this sort see Sanders (1999).
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
Complex outcomes are those that cannot be classified as equilibria, simple patterns or random. This approach works pretty well (Page 2011, 27).
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
To date Tufte has self-published four volumes on what he calls “analytical design” (Tufte 1990; 1997; 2001; 2006). The relevant secondary literature on Tufte’s work is sparse. In particular, his views seem to have generated virtually no sustained discussion in political science. This is true even of the work mentioned in the immediately preceding footnote. See, however, Grady (2006) and Zachary and Thralls (2004).
\end{quote}
What is to be sought in designs for the display of information is the clear portrayal of complexity. Not the complication of the simple; rather the task of the designer is to give visual access to the subtle and the difficult - that is, the revelation of the complex (Tufte 2001, 191).

Tufte offers myriad examples of good and bad design, a set of principles of “graphical integrity” meant to insure that design variation maps data variation rather than the reverse, and much advice about how to maximize (within reason) the data-ink ratio in, and so enhance the efficiency of, visual displays. All of this specific advice, however, is parasitic on a single underlying commitment, namely to an instrumental view of visual displays. Tufte endorses this commitment in the introduction to the same volume. “At their best, graphics are instruments for reasoning about quantitative information” (Tufte 2001, 9,91). Graphs and other sorts of visual display, in other words, are not simply ways of representing data, or conveying information, or presenting “the facts”. Like other components of inquiry, they are, on a view that pragmatists will embrace, tools we use to think with as we attempt to navigate the natural and social worlds. And, as with our theories, concepts, classifications, measures, and techniques more generally, we typically assess data graphics according to how well they work in meeting our aims. Virtually all of Tufte’s particular recommendations, unsurprisingly, revolve around how to create and refine graphical displays in ways that will enhance rather than hinder our capacity to think about complex problems we encounter17.

In this regard, Tufte, sometimes tacitly, often explicitly, endorses a problem-solving approach to inquiry that places a premium on producing sound explanations and assessing them in terms of their consequences (Tufte 2006, 131; 1997, 27-53)18. And he breaks problem-solving down into a set of more modest, if still crucially important tasks, for which visual displays of various sorts can prove useful. As he says:

The purpose of evidence presentation is to assist thinking. Thus presentations should be constructed so as to assist with the fundamental intellectual tasks in reasoning about evidence: describing the data, making multivariate comparisons, understanding causality, integrating a diversity of evidence, and documenting the analysis. . . . The principles of analytical design are derived from the principles of analytical thinking (Tufte 2006, 137).

One not-so-obvious way that visual displays can assist our thinking is to prompt us to address conceptual problems. This often will involve talking about things that remain unobservable. So, for instance, Tufte rightly notes that “understanding causality” requires that we identify and trace plausible causal mechanisms (Tufte 1997, 53). Those mechanisms

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17 “Here it is enough to note that notions, theories, systems, no matter how elaborate and self-consistent they are, must be regarded as hypotheses. They are to be accepted as bases of actions which test them, not as finalities. To perceive this fact is to abolish rigid dogmas from the world. It is to recognize that conceptions, theories and systems of thought are always open to development through use. It is to enforce the lesson that we must be on the lookout quite as much for indications to alter them as for opportunities to assert them. They are tools. As in the case of all tools, their value resides not in themselves but in their capacity to work shown in the consequences of their use” (Dewey 1948, 145). Compare Laudan (1990, 102-6) and Johnson. (2006, 2010).

18 At times, Tufte is inclined to talk about the aim of inquiry as discerning “Truth.” Among pragmatists the intimate relation of truth and inquiry is both commonly acknowledged and highly contested. For instance, Richard Rorty, Hilary Putnam, Cheryl Misak and Robert Brandom each offer sophisticated but quite distinct formulations of the relationship. Following Tufte down this path is beyond the scope of this paper. For a reliable tour of the terrain see Bernstein (2010).
typically consist in entities and activities that we cannot observe, at least in any direct sense\textsuperscript{19}. They are crucially important to social and political inquiry insofar as without them our “theories” often remain so poorly specified that it is difficult to know whether whatever data we might have can, in fact, provide evidence for or against the claims we are making (Tufte, 2006, 128-9, 142-3)\textsuperscript{20}. And they are crucial to democratic politics insofar as our appreciation of indirect consequences is informed by our capacity to identify and explore sometimes-intricate causal connections.

While Tufte’s views seem to underwrite a broadly pragmatist understanding of social and political inquiry, at least two important concerns remain. First, it is unclear how far Tufte would push his own views concerning analytical design for the visual display of data and information - whether, that is, he is concerned primarily about influencing policy-makers or about having an impact on the formation of publics more generally. Second, there is what may perhaps be a prior question regarding what for present purposes I will call the motivations, of both those who create graphic displays and those who view them. Despite the uncertain priority I will take up these matters in turn.

My first concern boils down to whether Tufte would endorse something like Lippmann’s restricted, technocratic view of democracy or something more like the expansive conception of democracy that Dewey endorsed\textsuperscript{21}. To the best of my knowledge he never offers his views on the matter one way or the other. Even if, in fact, he would endorse the former, nothing in particular prevents his views on analytical design from informing a pragmatist account of the latter sort. In other words, regardless of Tufte’s own political views, his principles of graphic design do not entail a technocratic vision. Indeed, at least three features of Tufte’s approach in fact impel him in a democratic direction.

First, when diagnosing the sources of various shortcomings in graphical practice, especially the sorts of “chartjunk” that divert attention from the substantive point to the design features of a visual display, Tufte repeatedly identifies as perhaps the most important problem the tendency of designers to underestimate viewers, to assume they are unsophisticated and unable and disengaged\textsuperscript{22}. In that sense, the principles of analytical design Tufte advocates are meant to mitigate the obstacles to clear thinking that poor graphical practice pose, thereby increasing the likelihood that people might actually use the displays effectively\textsuperscript{23}. And in that sense too he seems to share something resembling the confidence pragmatists from Dewey to Unger place in the potential intelligence of common citizens. Second, Tufte

\textsuperscript{19} On this point see Johnson (2006; 2010) and the large body of prior work on which those papers build.
\textsuperscript{20} On the larger point made here see Johnson (2002; 2003).
\textsuperscript{21} For such a pragmatist conception of democracy see Knight and Johnson (2007; 2011). Tufte himself has recently taken a post in Washington as an adviser to the Recovery Accountability and Transparency Board, which is the federal government outfit charged with keeping track of where the economic stimulus money has gone. See Cohen (2010) and Yaffe (2011). The latter refers to Tufte as “the graphics guru to the power elite,” hence capturing one possibility.
\textsuperscript{22} “Worse is contempt for our audience, designing as if readers were obtuse and uncaring, In fact, consumers of graphics are often more intelligent about the information at hand than those who fabricate the data decoration. And no matter what, the operating moral premise of information design should be that our readers are alert and caring; they may be busy, eager to get on with it, but they are not stupid. Clarity and simplicity are completely opposite simple-mindedness. Disrespect for the audience will leak through, damaging communication” Tufte (1990, 34). See also Tufte (2001, 79-87, 136-7). Compare Epstein, et. al. 2006, 1851, 1861-64.
points out that effective visual displays can accommodate diversity of interest and ability among viewers.

Visual displays of information encourage a diversity of individual viewer styles and rates of editing, personalizing, reasoning, and understanding. Unlike speech, visual displays are simultaneously a wideband and perceiver-controllable channel (Tufte 1990, 31).

Insofar as pragmatists insist that in the circumstances of politics, collective decision-making must accommodate individuals who express an irreducible plurality of material interests, ethical commitments and cultural attachments, this feature of visual displays must be seen as a virtue. Finally, Tufte endorses a view of communication that encourages designers to experiment with graphics and to collaborate with their audiences. Here again, he insists that if one views one’s audience as a collaborator, it is necessary to avoid underestimating them (Tufte 2001, 137).

In combination, this set of commitments place Tufte’s views in some proximity to the “faith” that Dewey (1939) repeatedly expresses “in the capacity of human beings for intelligent judgment and action if proper conditions are furnished”. And that faith, of course, provides all the grounding Dewey feels necessary for a belief in the possibility of “creative democracy”. It hardly is over-reaching to suggest that among the requisite conditions are effective practices of inquiry and dissemination.

A second concern that arises from Tufte’s writings revolves around the positivist impulse to police the boundaries of scientific inquiry and politics. Tufte prompts us to focus on the uses of visual displays, on who is creating and presenting graphical depictions of information, the purpose for which they are doing so, and the ethical, aesthetic and intellectual commitments that inform their enterprise. This is a rather massive topic. It raises the complex ways that “facts” and “values” are entangled in processes of inquiry (Putnam 2002). Much of contemporary political science is grounded in a faith – misguided in my view – that we somehow can evade such entanglement by asserting a stark dichotomy between facts and values. Yet Tufte’s concern for the ways aesthetic values inform the communication of quantitative data - captured most obviously in the title to his latest volume Beautiful Evidence - suggests that neither he nor we can embrace such a dichotomy in any firm way. That concern, in turn, is intimately interwoven with his systematic preoccupation with ethical standards of “integrity” for visual displays and the “responsibility” of those who create and disseminate them. Tufte, it seems, lends credence to the view that the cognitive, the aesthetic and the ethical dimensions of inquiry are entangled in thoroughgoing ways. Obviously, we might - for particular purposes, at particular points - be able to separate them out. But there is no dichotomy between facts and values to insulate inquiry from politics. This becomes especially clear when we consider Tufte’s assessment of particular graphics.

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24 On the circumstances of politics so conceived and their implications for democratic theory see Knight and Johnson (2011).

25 In his presidential address to the Southern Political Science Association, Bond (2007, 899) offers a recent, fervent profession of this faith: “The beginning of scientific inquiry is the fact/value dichotomy.” He places this claim first among the factors he takes to be the “key elements” of the scientific method. For recent, more or less dissecting views see Mihic, Engleman and Wingrove (2005) and Gerring and Yesnowitz (2006).

26 Compare the stress Epstein, et. al. (2006, 1847-51) place on “clarity,” “vividness,” and “impact” all of which are values.

27 For Tufte, aesthetics is linked inextricably to moral and political issues as well as cognitive ones, and this is the master theme that flows through his books (Grady 2006, 236). Crucially, Tufte ascribes responsibility not only to the purveyors of graphics but also to those who constitute their audience (Tufte 2006, 141).
Consider Tufte’s discussion of two examples of what he deems excellent graphics and the purposes for which they were used. The first appears near the start of Beautiful Evidence (Tufte 2006, 22-3). It is an astonishing blueprint-like diagram of the slave ship Vigi-lante, a “terrible grid” that – given the horrors of the middle passage – amounts to “a portrait of individual suffering multiplied by 347 people and then millions”. Tufte takes it from an 1823 engraving produced by J. Hawkesworth for a British anti-slavery publication. Put bluntly, among the first exemplar’s Tufte offers us in his most recent work is a 19th Century political graphic aimed at helping create a public that might actively oppose the slave trade. This point is brought home by the explicit, very favorable comparison he draws between Hawkesworth’s engraving and a second data graphic – Charles Joseph Minard’s map of Napoleon’s disastrous invasion of Russia.

Early on Tufte asserted that Minard’s data-map “may well be the best statistical graphic ever drawn” (Tufte 2001, 40). At that time, he was preoccupied narrowly with its aesthetic and cognitive qualities – the efficiency and grace with which Minard captures how time, distance and temperature conspired to reduce Napoleon’s invading force from nearly half a million troops to a mere ten thousand – and largely neglected the purposes for which he drew it. More recently, Tufte has come around to acknowledge that Minard’s map too is a political graphic, an “antiwar poster” animated by Minard’s horror at the “human costs of war” and drawn for the purpose of “memorializing the dead soldiers” who met their demise due to Napoleon’s ambition and folly (Tufte 2006, 134,136). Both Hawkesworth and Minard, then, produced data graphics, that, after roughly a century and a half, remain exemplary not just for the graphical integrity they embody but for the political commitment they convey. As exemplars of the principles of graphic design that Tufte extols, both also serve not just as displays of information but as instruments with which those who created them could prompt their audiences to think about large scale political events and from there, potentially at least, coordinate an effective response to the problems they depict.

**Taking Data Graphics to the Streets**

Tufte’s reflections on visual displays of information and their uses afford a useful point of departure for contemporary efforts to bring inquiry into democratic politics. This claim may well elicit skepticism from those who strike a “realistic” pose regarding the prospects of an expansive conception of democratic publics. For such readers it is (at least) highly unlikely that we might overcome the distinction between “insiders” and “outsiders” that underwrites Lippmann’s pessimistic political vision (Hannay 2005, 47-51,128-30). This is a provocative albeit commonplace position. It also is, in my view, unsustainable.

A pragmatist’s initial impulse is to challenge the dichotomy between insiders and outsiders. While this is a sometimes-useful distinction, it is crucial not to allow critics of democracy to inflate it into a full-fledged dichotomy trailing in its wake a set of quasi-

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28. Tufte is somewhat less effusive of late, referring to Minard’s map only as “one of the best statistical graphics ever” (stress added). He nonetheless relies on it as the sole vehicle for his exposition of “The Fundamental Principles of Analytical Design” (Tufte 2006, 122-39).

29. As a more contemporary example here one might consider Sutcliffe (2002), which actually offers 123 graphics that capture one or another dimension of problem of inequality announced in the book’s title. Sutcliffe explicitly announces his debt to Tufte in the introduction. Unfortunately, the small paperback, published by a left-wing press, hardly approximates the production values that would make the graphics especially powerful.
metaphysical, ultimately political commitments. In the case at hand, Lippmann’s view would lead us to insist that the political world necessarily consists in two broad, mutually exclusive, largely impermeable categories of actors. On the one side are competing politicians and the experts on whom they call to rationalize their policies and preferences. On the other is a disengaged, largely ignorant citizenry. I will not rehearse Lippmann’s argument. After all, even Dewey conceded that as a description of the actual political world Lippmann’s portrait was reasonably accurate. What is at issue, however, is whether the bifurcation Lippmann identifies is, as he believes, a necessary feature of complex modern societies. Dewey surely thought otherwise. There is little reason to suspect that it is.

We might first insist that publics are, as Dewey tacitly concedes in his own usage, plural. We become members of some public or other on his account insofar as the consequences of interactions to which we are not ourselves a party impact us in persisting, important, if indirect ways. Any such public will remain “inchoate” until those who constitute it recognize their common interests and coordinate around them. This does not require, therefore, that we ascribe the vast capacities of the “omnicompetent citizen” (which Lippmann found so implausible) to the members of any coordinated public. And while Dewey rightly stresses the crucial role “representatives” play in coordinating publics, neither does it require that we subscribe to Lippmann’s bifurcated view of the political world as unalterably composed of “agents” and “spectators” (Dewey 1927, 34-5, 76-77).

It is easy enough too not only to present a compelling counterexample to Lippmann’s dichotomy but to offer one where visual displays of quantitative information – data graphics – played a crucial role in helping coordinate an inchoate public. Consider the emergence of AIDS activism in New York specifically, but across the United States more generally during the mid-1980s. This was an emergent, internally diverse movement whose members integrated inquiry – including epidemiological, medical and social scientific research - into democratic politics in extremely innovative and effective ways. The point, in fact, is stronger. AIDS activists not only brought inquiry into democracy, but also brought a significant measure of democracy to the practice of scientific inquiry. In the process they both challenged extant structures of religious, media, scientific, business and political authority and became, in many instances, experts on the science and treatment of the disease (Epstein 2000). ACT UP, on this view, enacted a sometime volatile but intensely effective “combination of know-how and unruliness” that contested and redefined the boundary of inquiry and politics without seeking to efface the difference between the two domains (Reinhardt 1997, 168, 170).

In terms of concrete demands ACT UP sought (starting in 1987) to harangue, cajole, shame, and ridicule mainstream America - especially those occupying roles in our political, scientific and medical institutions - into recognizing and responding to the AIDS epidemic that was decimating not only communities of gay men, but women and racial minorities and the poor. ACT UP clearly wrestled with the heterogeneous character of the population susceptible to the disease, but they were single-minded about their basic, instrumental goal: “the central issue was getting AIDS treatments out of the NIH and FDA bureaucracies and

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30 Thus Dewey (1948, xxxi), for instance, decries “the whole brood and nest of dualisms which have, upon the whole, formed the ‘problems’ of philosophy.” As Putnam reminds us such dichotomies tend to divide the world categorically while “ordinary distinctions have ranges of application and we are not surprised if they do not always apply” (Putnam 2002, 11).

Although ACT UP has declared its graphics to be in the public domain, they are in fact controlled by the New York Public Library, which charges significant fees of permission to reproduce the images. Readers can find the ACT Up archive by searching for “ACT UP” at http://digitalgallery.nypl.org/nypldigital/index.cfm. In addition, Crimp (1990) reproduces many of the graphics I discuss below.
into the bodies of those who are HIV-infected” (Crimp 1990, 37). Arguably a prerequisite to such challenges was the formation of a public - or more appropriately an overlapping series of local publics - in precisely Dewey’s sense of the word. And a primary dimension of that task was to render the epidemic and its sources visible to an audience – consisting of members of directly affected communities as well as those who remained relatively insulated – that often could not, but also often actively refused to see it (Gamson 1989). ACT UP sought to portray AIDS as an epidemic rather than, for instance, a morality tale or tragic human-interest story by diverting attention away from this or that stricken individual and onto mind-numbing statistics and obscured causal processes. Graphical displays of quantitative data played a key element in this strategy (Crimp 1990; 2003). Design professionals, often working in collectives within umbrella organizations such as ACT UP, produced a significant number of high quality data graphics aimed at prompting even more encompassing constituencies to recognize, identify and mobilize around common interests and concerns. Several features of this mobilization bear comment.

First, as was the case with Hawkesworth and Minard, we are dealing here with distinctly political graphics that rely centrally on quantitative data. We have simple descriptive statistics: “AIDS: 1 in 61” referring to the ratio of babies born HIV positive in New York City and “25% TEST POSITIVE” referring to the population incarcerated by New York State. Likewise, we have multivariate displays: “The Government Has Blood on Its Hands: One AIDS Death Every Half-Hour” or, as the epidemic intensified, “. . . Every Ten Minutes”. But the aim here was less to present information than to illuminate, challenge and deflate the diffuse but potent moral and political norms that sustained the epidemic (Reinhart 1997, 173; Gamson 1989). Here again, it is important to stress that data graphics are not simply ways of representing data, or conveying information, or presenting “the facts”. Like other components of inquiry, they are tools we use to think with as we attempt to navigate – and indeed, reconfigure - the natural and social worlds.

Thus, a second significant dimension to ACT UP’s visual politics was to not just present numbers but to address the properly conceptual tasks of reforming classifications and reformulating causal narratives. For example, we are told: “Women Don’t Get AIDS, They Just Die From It”, accompanied by the percentage of female AIDS patients who die from conditions not included in official definitions of the disease. More generally, the AIDS epidemic, as these graphics represent it, results not from a virus transmitted by ‘deviant’ sexual practices, but from the unconcern and, indeed, active complicity of economic, political, religious, and media entities, both individual and institutional. Hence: “KISSING DOESN’T KILL: GREED AND INDIFFERENCE DO”. And “Why is Reagan Silent About AIDS? What Really is Going On at the Center for disease Control, the Federal Drug ADMINISTRATION and the Vatican?”. In that sense, by drawing attention to larger causal processes, ACT-UP shifted the locus of responsibility, or sought to, from HIV-positive persons onto the business executives, elected officials, bureaucratic functionaries, clergy and journalists who occupied positions in complicit economic, political, religious, and media institutions. The most potent logo, after all, identified the political causes of the problem. It reads not “HIV = DEATH”, but “SILENCE = DEATH”. In so doing, it invited viewers – indeed, invites them still - to think about the epidemic as a deep, broad “political crisis” and to transform lethal silence into action that might remedy that problem.

52 The acronyms Crimp uses stand for the National Institutes of Health and the Food and Drug Administration, both Federal government agencies. It is important to note that, in their confrontations with these agencies, AIDS activists were instrumental, for instance, in altering disease classifications and experimental treatment protocols in ways that expedited the availability of drugs (Epstein 2000).
Third, one significant dimension of the visual campaigns was the effort to establish that HIV is not a “gay” disease, and that the epidemic not only impacts individuals without discrimination - heterosexuals, women, ethnic and racial minorities, infants, and so forth - but does so in large numbers. An epidemic, after all, is an aggregate phenomenon. In other words, here “the public” seeking to identify and articulate its common concerns was both considerably larger and more heterogeneous than many considered it to be. ACT UP campaigns thus had multiple audiences:

“The graphics . . . codify concrete, specific issues of importance to the movement as a whole or to particular interests within it. They function as an organizing tool by conveying, in compressed form, information and political positions affected by the epidemic, to onlookers at the demonstrations, and to the dominant media. But their primary audience is the movement itself. AIDS activist graphics enunciate AIDS politics to and for all of us in the movement. . . . In the end, when the final product is wheat-pasted around the city, carried on protest placards, and worn on T-shirts, our politics and our cohesion around our politics become visible to us, and to those who will potentially join us” (Crimp 1990, 20).

Both enterprises, communicating with those outside the movement and with those in – or potentially in – it, obviously were fraught with conflict and disagreement. And there is no need to diminish those conflicts or to overstate the movement’s success at surmounting them (Gamson 1989) to see that ACT UP nonetheless was extremely adept at mobilizing for its basic purpose of getting “drugs into bodies”.

Finally, it is easy enough to see that our theme of visibility is woven intimately throughout the politics of ACT UP. But our second theme – complexity – is central to their endeavors as well. AIDS activists confronted the intellectual and emotional task of grasping how the etiology of disease, the operation of social and moral norms, and the functioning of political-economic institutions interacted to threaten and indeed end the lives of large numbers of men and women. This brings the distinctive features of ACT UP data graphics into sharper focus. Consider the terms Crimp, in retrospect, uses to appraise the graphics that ACT UP deployed.

I think that maybe one of the great things that ACT UP was able to do was to figure out ways of putting a certain complexity into slogans. Silence Equals Death is an extremely vague, and at the same time, extremely resonant image text, that, I mean, the way I wrote about it in AIDS Demo Graphics was that it was partly because one doesn’t necessarily immediately know what it means; what that pink triangle is, for example; why it’s upside down, in relation to the way it was historically used; how it was historically used. That’s not all right there. And yet, it became incredibly resonant for that very reason. So I think that there are ways, graphically and textually, to constitute a certain complexity. And I think that that was one of the achievements of the graphic and other representational work that ACT UP did (Crimp and Shulman, 2007, 40).

On his account AIDS activists used graphics in much the way Tufte suggests, not to simplify but rather to reveal complexity. This is true not just insofar as ACT UP’s graphics, for instance, incorporated numbers, highlighted the common threat to diverse populations, and contested common ascriptions of causality. It is true too, as Crimp intimates, precisely

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33 On the significant tensions and difficulties involved here see Gamson (1989).
34 Reinhardt (1997, 174) nicely elaborates on this point.
insofar as the group’s defining logo establishes equivalence (literally mathematical) between two abstract, seemingly disparate concepts.

**Conclusion**

Many of the problems to which politics is addressed consist of aggregate phenomena – not just elections and budgets, but wars, migrations, famines, and so forth. (ACT UP explicitly draws comparisons between the AIDS crisis and both war and genocide). And many of the difficulties that members of democratic publics confront consequently demand the ability to grasp the sorts of complexity that large numbers pose. For “realists” like Lippmann and his intellectual progeny this demand is disabling. They presume that ordinary men and women are incapable of such vision. And they marshal the findings of social and political research to bolster their claims. Regardless of their intentions, therefore, political scientists risk contributing to a self-confirming, anti-democratic politics.

Dewey formulates the basis for a pragmatist reply to this predicament. “Capacities” he reminds us “are limited by the objects and tools at hand” (Dewey 1927, 210). I have, by offering a pragmatist interpretation of Tufte’s theoretical analysis of data graphics and the visual politics of ACT UP, sought to indicate what such tools look like and how they have in fact and might in the future continue to operate to sustain a democratic relation between politics and inquiry. I make no pretense that my argument is definitive. It is instead more of a provocation, a challenge to political scientists to reconsider the tension that, as I noted at the start, besets their discipline.

**References**


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Kenneth W. Stikkers

Dewey, Economic Democracy, and the Mondragon Cooperatives

Abstract. This article argues that the Mondragon cooperatives, a network of worker-owned businesses in the Basque region of Spain, offers a concrete example of Deweyan economy, wherein democracy is part of everyday work-life. It first identifies three central features of Deweyan economy: a) its notion of economic growth is rooted in human growth; b) it is organic and evolutionary, not ideological or utopian; and c) it is empirical and experimental. Second, the article sketches some of the important historical and philosophical influences upon and distinct features of the Mondragon cooperatives, and, third, it indicates how the Mondragon cooperatives manifest each of the three central features of Deweyan economy. The article concludes by suggesting that the Mondragon cooperatives have achieved a previously unknown level of economic democracy and that its recent modifications in response to changing economic conditions, far from being retreats from fundamental principles, as some critics maintain, are evidence of Mondragon’s experimental, non-ideological character. Furthermore, it is an economic model that transcends the stale, false capitalist-socialist dichotomy and thereby helps us to imagine creative solutions to current economic problems.

Introduction

John Dewey, it is well known, believed that any deep and meaningful democracy must be more than a merely formal, procedural one, more than just the occasional casting of "one person, one vote": it must be “a way of life” that entails habits of participation in the governance of the institutions that affect people’s lives, proportional to their abilities and interests. Moreover, he did not consider “democracy”, in his sense, to be an ideological notion: democracy is but the application of the method of experimental scientific inquiry to social life and, as such, synonymous with healthy, thriving community. Indeed, by his broad definition, Dewey counted flourishing families as “democratic” (Dewey 1927: 325-30). According to such a notion, though, democracy in the United States is thin and superficial, and the United States’ boastful claims to being a beacon of democracy to the world ring hollow and contrast starkly to the authoritarian structures that dominate everyday economic life in the United States and to the plutocratic control of United States political institutions. Indeed, in Individualism Old and New Dewey notes the sharp contrast between the United States’ professed values of democracy, individualism, and liberty and the reality of autocratic corporate governance:

Most of those who are engaged in the outward work of production and distribution of economic commodities have no share – imaginative, intellectual, emotional – in directing the activities in which they physically participate. … economic associations are fixed in

1 “From the standpoint of the individual, [democracy] consists in having a responsible share according to capacity in forming and directing the activities of the groups in which one belongs and in participating according to need in the values which the group sustains” (Dewey 1927: 327-28).
ways which exclude most of the workers in them from taking part in their management. The subordination of the enterprise to pecuniary profit reacts to make the workers “hands” only. Their hearts and brains are not engaged. They execute plans which they do not form and of whose meaning and intent – beyond the fact that these plans make a profit for others and secure a wage for themselves (Dewey 1930: 104).

Democracy in the United States runs shallow and is not a feature of everyday economic life. What might an economy manifesting Deweyan democratic principles look like? While there have been some interesting applications of Dewey’s pragmatism to methodological issues of economy (e.g., Khalil 2004), far less has been done recently to apply Dewey’s social and political philosophy, especially his understanding of democracy, substantively to economy. In the early twentieth century pioneers of the institutionalist school of economics, most notably Thorstein Veblen and John Commons (Commons 1934), employed pragmatic methods and insights to offer penetrating analyses and critiques of the mainstream theories of their day, but, although there has been a significant upsurge of interest in institutionalist thinking, it nonetheless remains at the margins of the economic profession.

I wish to suggest here that the Mondragon Cooperative Corporation, a network of largely worker cooperatives in the Basque region of Spain, begun in the 1950’s, following Spain’s Civil War and Francisco Franco’s especially brutal treatment of the Basque people for having resisted his rise to power, provides an excellent example of Deweyan economy, although neither Pragmatism generally nor Dewey in particular has influenced the shaping of Mondragon. I will proceed by, first, delineating what I take to be some of the central features of a Deweyan economy and, second, describing some of the intellectual sources and central features of the Mondragon cooperatives, and I will conclude by highlighting the central ways in which Mondragon manifests the sort of economy that I believe Dewey would endorse.

Features of a Deweyan Economy

1. Economic growth as human growth

Dewey’s understanding of “democracy” is fundamentally tied to his notion of “growth”: democracy for him is the application of social intelligence and scientific method for the promotion of human growth. “Growth,” as he defines it in turn, consists of ever-increasing reconstructive possibilities for experience, in terms of its richness, complexity, and integrity: it is primarily qualitative, rather than quantitative. For an economy to be truly democratic and hence healthy, therefore, it must function in service to human growth: it must provide the material means for human growth to occur, and “economic growth” must be based in some such notion of healthy human growth or else it becomes an empty abstraction, disconnected from concrete human experience. As Dewey states, “Growth itself is the only moral ‘end’” (1920: 181).

Mainstream economics, too, speaks extensively of “growth”, but it is almost exclusively a quantitative notion, the quantity of goods produced: any sort of production, as measured by monetary market exchanges, is counted as “growth”. The late economist Kenneth Boulding often chastised his profession for its failure to make qualitative distinctions among types of growth. There is, on the one hand, the growth of healthy tissue – bone, muscle, brain – he would note, but on the other hand there are also fat and cancer. Conven-
tional economic accounting methods, such as per capita gross domestic product, employed by capitalists and socialists alike, however, treat all such types of growth the same: no qualitative distinctions are made among those types of production and consumption that promote healthy human growth and those that undermine it.

The failure of mainstream economics to make qualitative distinctions among types of growth coincides with its reduction of economic value to what is valued by economic agents, namely, buyers and sellers, in accord with the utilitarian calculus that underlies it: economic goods within the market are considered valuable solely to the extent that they are valued by consumers, in accord with the utility they anticipate from the goods’ consumption, and producers, in accord with the disutility of their production. Hence, mainstream economists make no distinction between warranted human needs and unwarranted, superfluous wants: both are lumped together as “consumer demand”.

Dewey, however, like John Stuart Mill, breaks from Jeremy Bentham’s narrow utilitarianism and maintains that intelligent distinctions can be made between what is valuable and what is valued, between what is desirable and what is desired, between legitimate human needs and superfluous, unintelligent wants. Intelligence, for Dewey, transforms the vague, indefinite impulses of the organism into specifiable, focused desires for some definite objects and then deliberates about and mediates the competing desires of the organism according to competing notions of “value” and “good,” giving impulses and desires order and greater unity. Intelligence is not merely the slave of desire but an instrument of human growth (Dewey 1922: 132).

Furthermore, the subordination of human growth to economic growth is not only manifest in mainstream economic thinking and theorizing, it is existentially felt in the everyday work-lives of many: throughout modern economy workers – high- and low-paid alike – experience themselves as the tools of economic systems and their values of efficient production, as “human capital”; life experiences itself as serving the economic machinery. As Dewey writes, “Instead of the development [growth?] of individualities which [the United States] prophetically put forth, there is the perversion of the whole ideal of individualism to conform to the practices of a pecuniary culture” (Dewey 1930: 49).

Democracy as a way of life, for Dewey, therefore, must entail the building of economic institutions that engender a feeling of the enhanced fullness of life. In this vein Dewey criticized museum and concert hall forms of art that act to compensate for the lack of experienced beauty and joy in everyday work-life. The greatest problem in modern economic thinking, Dewey suggested, lies in its tendency to dichotomize falsely means from ends and thereby to see economic activity as merely a means to other, more desirable or “higher” ends, as drudgery to be endured in order, at the end of the work day, to shop and consume:

No one can possibly estimate how much of the obnoxious materialism and brutality of our economic life is due to the fact that economic ends have been regarded as merely instrumental. When they are recognized to be intrinsic and final in their place as any others, then it will be seen that they are capable of idealization, and that if life is to be worth while, they must acquire ideal and intrinsic value. Esthetic, religious and other “ideal” ends are now thin and meager or else idle and luxurious because of the separation from “instrumental” or economic ends. Only in connection with the latter can they be woven into the texture of daily life and made substantial and pervasive (Dewey 1920: 178; emphasis in the original).

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The development of economic institutions wherein productive economic activity is experienced as manifesting intrinsic, aesthetic value thus goes hand-in-hand with the conceiving of economic growth as serving and as integrated with human growth.

2. Organic, evolutionary economics versus ideological, utopian economics

Dewey sharply criticizes traditional political theory, from Plato to his present-day, for imagining its task to be conceiving “what the state in general should or must be” (Dewey 1927: 256-57), designing an ideal, utopian republic, rather than solving practically the messy, concrete problems of everyday public life. His claim is part of the larger criticism that pragmatists level against philosophy generally, namely, that its abstract theorizings have become far too removed from the concrete, existential problems of human life. As William James boldly proclaims, as a fundamental notion of pragmatism, “I do not believe it to be healthy-minded to nurse the notion that ideals are self-sufficient and require no actualization to make us content, ... ideals ought to aim at the transformation of reality--no less!” (James 1907: II, 270). Like Karl Marx, pragmatists hold that philosophy ought to improve the world and not merely describe what it is or even what it ideally ought to be. Or, as Dewey puts it famously in his general call for a “recovery of philosophy”: “Philosophy recovers itself when it ceases to be a device for dealing with the problems of philosophers and becomes a method, cultivated by philosophers, for dealing with the problems of men” (Dewey 1917: 46). And he elaborated on how the rigorous application of radically empirical, pragmatic method would bring about such a recovery:

What empirical method exacts of philosophy is two things: First, that refined methods and products be traced back to their origin in primary experience, in all its heterogeneity and fullness; so that the needs and problems out of which they arise and which they have to satisfy be acknowledged. Secondly, that the secondary schools’ methods and conclusions be brought back to the things of ordinary experience, in all their coarseness and crudity, for verification (Dewey 1925: 39).

Clearly economics, especially as once a part of moral philosophy, stands in similar need of recovery. What pragmatism recommends is that economic theory similarly needs to understand itself not in terms of the construction of ideal models, whose austere beauty the ideologue, whether capitalist or communist, first beholds and then aims to impose upon economic life from above, often coercively, but as conceptual tools for the solving of concrete human problems and, as we saw above, the construction of institutions that aid in the cultivation of human growth. Economist Thorstein Veblen, inspired greatly by pragmatism, initiated such a reconstruction of economics by starting his theorizing regarding business civilization and its leisure class, not by imagining what the economy in general should or must be, but by empirically examining and generalizing from the concrete practices of the businessmen of his day – their habits, values, and practices of conspicuous consumption and waste (e.g., Veblen 1899, 1904).

Furthermore, because organisms, and with them their tools, evolve in response to the problems they encounter in their environment, so, too, theories, including economic ones, need to be understood as evolving. Economics is to be conceived as an evolutionary science in a two-fold way: it must understand itself and its theoretical constructs as evolving, and its conceptual tools need to be informed by the latest findings of evolutionary science. Mainstream economics, however, Veblen complains, because it sees its mission, in the Pla-
tonic tradition, as one of describing the ideal form of economy, and because it rests so heavily upon pre-Darwinian Newtonian mechanics in constructing its models, is no evolutionary science (Veblen 1898).

3. Empirical, experimental science versus ideology posing as “science”

Understanding economic concepts and theories, as Dewey understood them, namely, as evolving conceptual tools for solving the concrete problems of living, growing persons, makes the error of economic ideological thinking abundantly clear. By “economic ideology” I mean here the mistake of seeing economic concepts and models as fixed, eternal ideals, resembling Platonic forms, that define a priori what a healthy economy must be and to which we must conform our economic behavior and institutions. Like religious fundamentalists, economic ideologues, libertarians and Trotskyites alike, cling tenaciously to their economic models, insisting, in the face of empirical evidence that contradicts their assumptions, that failure always lies in a lack of effort to conform to the model. By contrast Dewey urges economists to use their conceptual tools experimentally and either to modify or to abandon them when empirical evidence indicates that they are failing to solve the public problems that they were intended to solve. He criticizes ideologues of both the right and left, who are willing to allow human beings to starve, suffer, and even die in the name of some pure theoretical ideal, such as the purity of “free markets” or of some sort of communism, thus drawing attacks from both extremes of the political spectrum. Indeed, in criticizing the Marxists of his day Dewey proclaims, “It is ironical that the theory which has made the most display and the greatest pretense of having a scientific foundation should be the one which has violated most systematically every principle of scientific method” (Dewey 1939: 135). More recently Robert Heilbroner offers a powerful critique of how contemporary economic “science” provides a “veil” for the interests of the “regime of capital” and the ideology of free market capitalism (Heilbroner 1988).

Dewey famously exposes numerous false dichotomies of traditional philosophy – subject-object, nature-culture, fact-value, to name just a few of the more important ones. Similarly, his views of economics transcend the stale false dichotomy of capitalism-socialism. Dewey distinguishes, however, false dichotomies from useful, meaningful distinctions: the terms of deconstructed false dichotomies might still be used meaningfully to designate differing sorts of tools – conceptual, strategic, and institutional – for solving various sorts of economic problems. If the terms, though, cease to be useful in solving our problems and only get in our way, then they are to be jettisoned in favor of more useful ones. “Capitalism” and “socialism,” “free markets” and “economic planning,” might sometimes be useful in articulating and analyzing economic problems and formulating solutions to them, but when they serve only to divide publics and thereby undermine effective social action, they need to be put aside if not banished from the discussion altogether. In any case, potentially useful economic terms must not solidify into intransient, dichotomous ideologies that claim a priori and without experimental testing, that only certain types of conceptual tools – e.g., “free markets” or “economic planning” – are allowed to solve the economic problems of publics. For Dewey, it matters not whether a proposed solution is “capitalist” or “socialist,” but only whether it works or not to solve public problems and promote human growth.
Worker cooperatives—economic enterprises owned and controlled by those performing the productive labor—are not new and might be dated back to the “reductions” created by the Jesuits in early seventeenth-century Paraguay to help the indigenous peoples of South America protect themselves from the slave trade, and which lasted 160 years (McNaspy 1982, 1984). This model was influenced by St. Thomas More’s *Utopia*. From that work the Jesuits knew already about the brutality of the new economic order that was emerging out of England, through the acts of enclosure, and they looked for alternatives, as they sought more immediately to shield the indigenous peoples of Latin America from the slave trade. More, in the same book, offered a vision for such an alternative, but by modern standards it appears authoritarian and even oppressive. Similarly, the Jesuits were paternalistic toward the indigenous peoples in their governance of the reductions, and although there were some measures of democratic participation on the part of those peoples, the reductions were a long way from Deweyan democracy. In these communities, indigenous peoples cooperatively owned and farmed the land. The Jesuits also organized these people in the manufacturing of musical instruments, most of which were exported to Europe. These instruments were among the finest in the world. The reductions also built very impressive structures—churches, roads, fortifications, and schools.

In 1799, British industrialist Robert Owen set about correcting the abuses that came with industrialization and created the first industrial cooperative. He began purchasing, with several partners, a factory at New Lanark and organizing it so that the workers, most of them from the workhouses of the cities, participated in its management and benefited from its profits. Owen believed that persons are largely products of their environment and socialization, and therefore progressive education for workers and their families was central to the New Lanark project. By all accounts it was highly efficient and successful, although Owen severed himself from it in 1828. It operated until 1968, but not as a cooperative. Owen also built, in 1825, a utopian community, New Harmony, in southern Indiana, approximately 200 kilometers from this author’s university. This community also achieved sufficient success to demonstrate that worker cooperatives could succeed, but for various reasons, which we will not discuss here, New Harmony eventually failed. Owen shared the view of such diverse thinkers as Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, Karl Marx, and Amartya Sen, that economy ought to concern itself primarily with fostering excellence in human character and developing people’s capabilities—inner goodness—rather than with the mere optimizing of utility derived from external goods. Owen’s ideas have had lasting influences, especially upon the Mondragon cooperatives in Spain.

Indeed, the worker cooperative communities created by Owen and other utopian socialists, as well as the progressive system of profit-sharing that Edme-Jean Leclaire established in Paris, were sufficiently successful to inspire John Stuart Mill to argue, in his *Principles of Political Economy*, that cooperatives, owned primarily but not solely by the workers themselves, would be the next phase in the natural evolution of capitalism. Such cooperatives would outperform traditional capitalist firms, Mill argued, because they would be more efficient. As owners of their own businesses, workers work harder; they manage themselves, thereby saving the huge expense of having to employ supervisors; they strive for increased efficiencies and vigilantly work to eliminate waste because they themselves benefit. Furthermore, not being pressured to return maximum profits to investors imme-
diately, such cooperatives could retain fixed portions of profits as reserves and for rein-
vestment3.

More important than their economic advantages, though, cooperatives mark for Mill a
significant advancement in the realization of democratic ideals:

The form of association, however, which if mankind continue to improve, must be ex-
pected in the end to predominate, is not that which can exist between a capitalist as chief,
and work/people without a voice in the management, but the association of the labourers
themselves on terms of equality, collectively owning the capital with which they carry on
their operations, and working under managers elected and removable by themselves (Mill
1848: 133).

Furthermore, Mill maintains that such expansion of real democracy will inevitably advance
gender equality, a cause for which he and his wife, Harriet Taylor, famously fought: “The
same reasons which make it no longer necessary that the poor should depend on the rich,
make it equally unnecessary that women should depend on men” (Mill 1848: 125).

So, although the idea of worker cooperatives is centuries-old, the Mondragon cooper-
avtives are the most impressive and successful industrial ones to date4. The parish priest of
Mondragon, Father Jose Arizmendiarrrieta, led their creation, and Mondragon’s success is
all the more impressive in light of the devastation and oppression that the Basque people
suffered, including the destruction of their ancient capital, Guernica, immortalized by Pablo
Picasso’s famous painting. Arizmendiarieta was well educated in economics, sociology,
and social/political philosophy, including the works of both Smith and Marx, but the main
intellectual influences upon him were Robert Owen and the tradition of Catholic social jus-
tice teachings.

Owen’s efforts persuaded Arizmendiarieta that industrial cooperatives could be suc-
cessful, but equally important Owen’s cooperative at New Lenarck warned Arizmendiari-
eta against making a huge mistake. In order to raise capital for expansion, in response to its
success, the New Lenarck cooperative opened itself to outside investors. Those investors
then quickly took over the cooperative and converted it into a traditional capitalist firm,
whose chief aim was profit and not social reform and improvement of the conditions of
working-class people.

Catholic social justice teachings can be traced all the way back to the early Church, in-
cluding the writings of Saints Ambrose, Basil, John Chrysostom, Clement of Alexandria,
and Augustine – all of whom teach that God gave the goods of the earth to all of humanity
in common and against private property (Avila 1983) – and through the works of St. Thom-
as Aquinas, who justifies limited personal property, following Aristotle’s arguments
against Plato’s communism5. In the modern era, however, Catholic social justice teachings,
responding to the ills of the industrial revolution, begin with Pope Leo XIII’s 1890 Rerum
Novarum, which had an especially profound influence on Arizmendiarieta (Cheney 1999:
55). In that encyclical Leo XIII criticizes both capitalism and socialism and called for a
third option to them. More recently, Pope John Paul II renewed Leo XIII’s criticisms and
call (John Paul II 1991: Ch. II, 16), and he points to cooperatives, such as Mondragon, as
embodiments of Catholic social justice teachings6. For both pontiffs Christianity emphati-

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4 Although much of its factual information is dated Morrison (1991) remains one of the best analyses of Mon-
dragon and especially the philosophy underlying it.
5 Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologia, 2nd Pt. of 2nd Pt., Ques. 66, Art. 2.
cally affirms the primacy of labor over capital and thus rejects a “rigid capitalism” that places the interests of capital over those of labor. As John Paul II boldly states, the means of production “cannot be possessed against labor, they cannot even be possessed for possession’s sake, because the only legitimate title to their possession … is that they should serve labor”. From the point of view of the Catholic social justice tradition, then, “the position of ‘rigid’ capitalism continues to remain unacceptable, namely the position that defends the exclusive right to private ownership of the means of production as an untouchable ‘dogma’ of economic life” (John Paul II 1981: 31-32).

The Mondragon Cooperative Corporation presently employs 85,000 people, manufactures virtually every sort of consumer and capital goods, with annual revenues of almost 15 billion Euros, and commands over 33 billion Euros in total assets (Mondragon 2011). The core of Mondragon is its impressive array of over 300 worker-owned producer cooperatives, but it is supported and enhanced by a number of consumer, agricultural, housing, and “second-degree” cooperatives. Second-degree cooperatives are owned and operated by the other cooperatives as well as their own workers. They include a bank, the Caja Laboral Popular (Working Peoples’ Bank), about whose importance we will say more later, a research center, health and social security services, and schools, including a recently opened university.

In recent years Mondragon has established itself as the vanguard of the international cooperative movement, anticipating the United Nations’ “Year of the Cooperatives” in 2012. It has created dozens of development offices around the world and has entered into collaborative arrangements with cooperatives outside its region, for example, in France and Italy.

Let us selectively list some central features of the Mondragon cooperatives especially helpful to our analysis here. These features pertain especially to the producer cooperatives but are modified to fit the nature and purposes of the other cooperatives.

1. Workers as owners; owners as workers. For the first half of Mondragon’s history every worker was an owner, and every owner was a worker. More recently, however, Mondragon cooperatives are allowed a growing number of contract workers, who are non-owners. Mondragon learned early on that some workers simply do not want to be involved in the responsibilities of cooperative ownership. Moreover, non-owner workers allow the Mondragon cooperatives greater flexibility in times of economic downturn. Over 85% of Mondragon workers, however, remain co-owners of the cooperatives in which they work.

2. Governance. Ultimate power for each cooperative lies in its General Assembly, which meets at least once per year and consists of all the cooperative’s members, each having one vote. Attendance averages 70% (Cheney 1999: 58). Member-workers democratically elect a Governing Council and a Social Council, each consisting entirely of worker-owners. The Governing Council is responsible for management of the cooperative and hires and fires managers, who might come from within or be recruited from outside the cooperative. Once elected, managers enjoy considerable control over day-to-day operations. Ultimately, however, they are responsible to the worker-owners, through their Governing Councils, who do not hesitate to dismiss managers who do not perform well. The Social Council is responsible for determining salaries and working conditions, and Cheney reports that the strongest cooperatives in Mondragon are those that maintain the healthiest balances between their Governing and Social Councils (Cheney 1999: 60-61).

3. Wage differentials. Wages vary, depending on workers’ skill, responsibility, and the difficulty of tasks, but each cooperative within Mondragon establishes what it considers an
appropriate fixed ratio between its highest and lowest paid workers. In some cooperatives
this ratio is allowed to go as high as 9:1, although none actually do go so high, and the av-
erage among the cooperatives is about 4.5:1. By contrast, ratios in major U.S. corporations
are often well over 1000:1.

4. Distribution of profits. Profits are distributed by a fixed formula. 20% is retained as
reserves. 10% goes to the community, often to support local schools. The rest are distri-
buted to the workers according to their salaries and length of employment, but workers re-
ceive their share of profits only upon leaving the cooperative, thereby preventing any exter-
nal ownership of the business. Moreover, this arrangement means that 90% of all profits--
all but the 10% given to the community--can be reinvested in the business or held as cu-
shion in hard time. Mondragon cooperatives enjoin an extraordinary rate of reinvestment,
not found anywhere among traditional capitalist firms, and it gives Mondragon cooperatives
a powerful competitive advantage over other businesses.

5. Cooperation among cooperatives. Cooperation among cooperatives is institutiona-
лизed in at least two ways. First, every study of Mondragon confirms that key to its success
and what most distinguishes it from other cooperatives throughout the world and in the
past, is the role of its bank. The Caja Laboral Popular, as a second-degree cooperative, is
owned and operated by the other cooperatives, as well as by its own workers, thereby link-
ing together all the cooperatives into a web of mutual financial support. The primary objec-
tive of the bank is not to maximize its profits but to assist the member cooperatives, facil i-
tate new cooperatives, and insure that they all succeed. The system is so good that, in over
50 years, fewer than three percent of Mondragon cooperatives have ceased, many of those
not even for financial reasons, compared to new-business failures of 60-80% in the United
States.

Second, and in addition to the bank, Mondragon cooperatives are structurally unified by
the Cooperative Congress, begun in 1986. The Congress, with delegates from all of the co-
operatives, provides a forum for discussing broad matters of social vision and general pol i-
cy and “represents the firm consolidation of democratic control”, but it has no coercive
power (Morrison 1991: 160).

6. Anarchism and the State. A secondary influence on Arizmendiarrieta’s creation of
Mondragon was the anarcho-syndicalist producer cooperatives in Catalonia, which operated
before and through the Spanish Civil War (Cheney 1999: 39). Furthermore, Arizmendiari-
rieta, despite being a cleric in the highly hierarchical Catholic Church, disliked centralized
power and refused any position of formal authority in Mondragon, except as Director of the
League for Education and Culture (Morrison 1991: 143). Indeed, some describe Mondragon
 as an “anarchist” economy because, although its cooperatives do pay taxes to the central
government, they operate largely independently of the state, providing their own social se-
curity and health care benefits and operating their own schools and university. This ana-
archist strain in Mondragon, however, is due more to historical circumstances than to ana-
archist political philosophy. As a result of its civil war and Franco’s oppression, the Basque
region became increasingly separated from the rest of Spain: it was left to rebuild itself
without assistance from the Spanish government, centered in Madrid. Plus, as mentioned
already, Franco’s oppression intensified Basque nationalism. If Mondragon is “anarchistic”,
it is mainly because the region grew used to living without the state.

7. The place of profit. Because the cooperatives are owned and self-managed by the
workers themselves, they measure their performance not by profits but by job creation,
quality, and security. Indeed, a central principle of Mondragon is the subordination of capi-
tal and profits to labor (in accord with Catholic social principles, as we saw above). Of
course cooperatives must be profitable in order to continue, but profit is seen only as a means to securing employment and a better life for workers, not as an end in itself.

8. Environmental stewardship. Mondragon cooperatives are of varying sizes: some consist of only a few workers, while others consist of thousands of workers. Moreover, some involve heavy industry which could pose severe environmental problems to the region. Because local workers own the Mondragon cooperatives, however, they experience themselves the consequences of any environmentally irresponsible actions. Thus, they are often viewed as models of environmental stewardship and responsibility and have been recognized as such by European environmentalist groups. Indeed, Morrison describes Mondragon as a model of “ecological postmodernism” and takes its environmental record to be its greatest achievement (Morrison 1991: 4-5). As he notes, a core value of Mondragon is “equilibrio,” which manifests itself not just in cooperative human relationships but also in harmony with nature (Morrison 1991: 162-63).

9. Education for democratic cooperative life. From the very beginning education has been at Mondragon’s foundation, and 13 years before the creation of its first cooperative, Arizmendiarieta formed, in 1943, a technical and professional school, which produced much of Mondragon’s early leadership. His own philosophy of education was strongly influenced by the work of Paulo Freire: education not only prepares people for productive work, but, more importantly, it provides the means for self-liberation. Like Dewey, Arizmendiarieta, following Freire, believed that proper education for democratic life must not merely teach the formal principles of democracy but must itself be democratic. So Mondragon has built an impressive set of educational institutions, from pre-schools to a university, democratically operated by teachers, parents, elements of the community, and students. The schools teach not only practical, technical, and professional skills, but also the Basque language and culture, cooperative principles and values, and the philosophy underlying them. Indeed, as partial member-owners, students in the technical school participate in its governance and thereby not only learn about but also practice democracy as a way of life.

Although this description of the Mondragon cooperatives has been brief, how they exemplify the central features of Deweyan economics should be evident. They have attained a level of economic democracy unmatched ever in world history: theirs is not merely a formal political democracy wherein people go to the polls every few years to cast ballots and which can be manipulated too easily by powerful moneyed, anti-democratic interests. Rather, theirs is a democracy that workers practice everyday at their places of work.

Mondragon has effectively institutionalized the integration of human growth into economic growth through its subordination of capital to labor. As Cheney describes, “Seeing themselves as neither in the service of capital nor alienated from it, the coops aimed to subordinate the maintenance of capital to the interests of labor and human values” (Cheney 1999: 38-39). Labor democratically controls capital and is treated thereby as a fixed rather than a variable cost of production. In times of economic difficulty, such as the present, labor is the absolutely last expense to be cut, and even then workers will be transferred to another cooperative or sent to the technical school or university for retraining rather than laid off altogether. As we saw Mondragon derived this principle of the subordination of capital to labor from Catholic social teaching, and Arizmendiarieta considered it a matter of social justice: “Cooperation is an authentic integration of the person in the economic and social process, and it is central to a new social order; employees working cooperatively ought to unite around this ultimate objective, along with all who hunger and thirst for justice in this world of work” (as quoted and translated by Cheney 1999: 39). Mondragon measures economic growth not by the sheer quantity of goods produced and consumed but
on the basis of the cooperatives’ ability to provide stable employment in accord with human dignity. Profit is treated not as the purpose of business but as a means to create the conditions for dignified human living. As Cheney describes, “the growth of the cooperatives … has meant far more than ‘adding more of the same’ to existing structures”, but has included the personal growth of members as well as the strengthening of relationships among themselves, with the community, and even with the world and the capacity of the enterprise to adapt to a changing global economic environment (Cheney 1999: 74).

Mondragon emerged in response to the colossal concrete problem of a devastated Basque region, and its focus has remained improving the quality of life of its people, not profit maximization or rigid conformity to any utopian ideal. It has certain guiding ideals and principles, but these are continuously rethought in light of changing conditions. Mondragon has remained experimental, as a slogan often repeated there indicates: “We build the road as we travel”. This is economic pragmatism at its best. Indeed, both Morrison and especially Cheney examine how Mondragon has experimentally evolved and grown in response to increasing encounters with global market forces and pressures that challenge its democratic commitments.

Mondragon’s capacity to change and evolve is seen in two specific examples. First, Mondragon began committed to the ideal of every worker being an owner. It discovered, however, that not every worker wanted the responsibility of ownership. In addition, Mondragon learned that there is a trade-off between economic growth, which provides more jobs for people, on the one hand, and job security, on the other. It thus tries to strike a balance between these two desirable but conflicting aims and allows member cooperatives to hire certain percentages of non-owner workers (Cheney 1999: 77).

A second example involves the ratio of highest paid to lowest paid workers. At its start Mondragon enforced a 3:1 ratio. This was increased to 4.5:1, especially to attract top-quality physicians as it established its system of universal health-care. It was increased again to 6:1, and now each cooperative is allowed to establish its own ratio. Some cooperatives allow for a ratio as high as 9:1, although none practice it, and the average is 4.5:1.

In these and other instances Mondragon has been criticized by some for forsaking its principles in order to grow and by others for not compromising more in order to promote even more growth. Indeed, in 1991 a group of four cooperatives – later five – broke away from the Mondragon Cooperative Corporation to create the ULMA group because its members believed that the MCC had drifted too far away from its founding principles, especially with respect to salary, in its pursuit of growth. ULMA continues, however, to cooperate closely with MCC on many matters, including the building of Mondragon University, and to belong to Caja Laboral Popular (Cheney 1999: 85). Some, too, have expressed concerns, both on the left and, surprisingly, from the Catholic Church, that a managerial elite has arisen. I, along with many within Mondragon, simply do not see this because ultimately management is responsible to the democratically expressed interests and desires of the worker-owners: effective mechanisms are in place to insure this responsibility (Cheney 1999: 44).

I see Mondragon’s flexibility and willingness to adapt in the face of changing economic realities as one of its strengths rather than a weakness, and I believe Dewey would agree. Principles, like all concepts, ought to function in the service of human growth, not as the a priori definition of growth: the quality of concrete human experience, not adherence to principles, is the proper measure of growth. Throughout all its adaptations and changes, Mondragon has held true to an understanding of “growth” and “democracy” that is both grounded in experience and comprehensive.
So, are cooperatives such as Mondragon capitalistic or socialistic? Or, are they a third type of economic system? Does it matter? The answer to such questions depends on how one defines “capitalism” and “socialism”.

“Capitalism” is defined traditionally, including by Marx, as a system of private ownership of capital, or the means of production, and “socialism” is defined as a system of collective ownership of capital, for example, by the state. If we define “capitalism” and “socialism” in these ways, then the Mondragon cooperatives are capitalist enterprises (as Mill envisioned worker cooperatives) because they are restrictively owned by the workers and not by the society generally or the state. They might be termed a system of “worker capitalism” because the workers are the capitalists. Partially for this reason cooperatives were strongly criticized by Marx and his followers (Morrison 1991: 151). Indeed, the most critical study of Mondragon was authored by a Marxist (Kasmir 1996).

If, however, we define “capitalism” as either a system that privileges the interests of capitalists, over those of workers, or as a system in which capital hires labor, then cooperatives are not capitalistic. In cooperatives capital serves labor; labor owns and controls capital. Cooperatives measure themselves by what they do for the workers who own them. Do they provide secure employment and serve the workers’ well-being? To do these things well, of course they must be profitable, but the making of profit, as we noted with respect to Mondragon, is not the end or purpose of the cooperative: profit is but a means for serving the growth of workers, both quantitatively and qualitatively.

So, because cooperatives such as Mondragon do not clearly fit the definition of either “capitalism” or “socialism”, I believe that they are best understood as a genuinely third option, transcending the false capitalism-socialism dichotomy. If only for that reason, they are valuable to study because they help to free our imaginations to envision possibilities for economy beyond the stale capitalist-socialist debate. Far more important, though, than the label we might choose to describe cooperatives, like Mondragon, is what they might teach us about how to create a better, healthier, more just world, for ourselves and for generations to come.

Indeed, Mondragon is an economic model that many defenders of both “capitalism” and “socialism” might embrace if they can see beyond those ideological terms. Socialists and liberal progressives often see Mondragon as effectively achieving workplace democracy and overcoming the exploitation and alienation that they associate with capitalism. Overall and contrary to criticisms mentioned above, there are few perceived class-distinctions in Mondragon: Mondragon has done more to obliterate class distinctions and hierarchies than any other industrialized society of which I am aware, although such is not an expressed goal of Mondragon as it is of Marxists, and it has created a society in which there is a strong sense of solidarity among all the people in creating a better life for everyone—for themselves, for their children, and for generations to come. On the other hand, Mondragon has appeal to defenders of free market capitalism because, first, it maintains restricted ownership of capital: capital is not state-owned but held by limited, identifiable groups of workers. Mondragon cooperatives avoid competing among themselves, but they do allow markets to set prices. Furthermore, although there is a degree of centralized planning, it is through the bank and not the state, and as indicated above, Mondragon operates largely independently of the state. That it transcends the traditional, false socialist-capitalist dichotomy and thereby is able to bring together those on both sides of that divide in an expanded sense of a “public” (in Dewey’s sense), is one of Mondragon’s most important significances.
As the Dewey-inspired institutionalists maintained, though, economies must always be studied and understood within the larger contexts of their cultures. Therefore, I do not think, nor would Dewey, that one can simply abstract the Mondragon model from the Basque culture and history out of which it grew. For example, due to the oppression that the Basque people experienced, they enjoy a high degree of heart-felt solidarity, which few if any industrial nations enjoy. Furthermore, they have one of the oldest traditions of democracy in the world, stretching back to medieval times. They take as self-evident that people have a right to participate in the governance of the institutions that affect their lives. Such a unique history and tradition contribute significantly to Mondragon’s success. I do think, however, that we can learn much from Mondragon: Mondragon inspires us to create a better world for ourselves and for our children, and the study of it frees our imaginations to think about possibilities for economy that conventional economic theories, especially those designed to defend the structures of capitalism and the interests of capitalists, do not allow us to consider. Moreover, for those of us inspired by Dewey’s social and political philosophy, it helps us to imagine the sort of economy Dewey might have helped to create.

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David H. Brendel

*Can Patients and Psychiatrists be Friends?: A Pragmatist Viewpoint*

**Abstract.** Relationships between patients and psychiatrists are shaped by a complex array of factors. The clinical experience centers on diagnostic and treatment decisions occurring in the context of a structured relationship that is regulated by principles of professional ethics and personal boundaries. At the same, however, patients and psychiatrists are unique and autonomous agents with emotional responses to one another that may evoke a wish for a personal friendship or other sorts of personal relationships that are outside the bounds of the usual professionally defined structures. Negotiating the tension between the need for professional regulation and the desire for developing a friendship with certain patients can present clinical and ethical challenges in psychiatric practice. Pragmatist reasoning can help the psychiatrist and patient to successfully negotiate the dilemma that may arise when either or both of them wishes to develop a personal friendship but still adhere to the ethical tenets of the patient/psychiatrist professional dyad.

**The Dilemma of Patient/Psychiatrist Friendship**

The patient/psychiatrist relationship is one of the most complex in contemporary society. Individuals with an incredibly broad range of emotional and interpersonal problems come to psychiatrists expecting rigorous diagnosis in accordance with current medical knowledge, support and empathic understanding, and the highest level of professionalism (including respect, discretion, privacy, and confidentiality). Psychiatrists must use their scientific understanding of the brain, their psychological understanding of the human mind and interpersonal relationships, and their gut-level intuitions about people to guide them in asking the right questions, establishing accurate diagnoses, and prescribing the right course of treatment (including psychotropic medications, psychotherapies, and other modalities). In order to accomplish these goals, they must gather an enormous amount of personal information about the patient and establish a therapeutic alliance that is based on trust and fidelity to the professional role. In the very best situations, and especially in long-term treatment, a mutual bond between the two individuals gets forged. That bond is marked by mutual respect, trust, and emotional resonance.

In some cases, as the bond solidifies over time and the patient gets well, the professional relationship can begin to look and feel like a friendship. I will soon define in some more detail what I mean by friendship in this context. But for the moment, I will articulate what I take to be a core tension and dilemma in psychiatric practice today. In ideal treatment situations, the patient and the psychiatrist develop a deep interpersonal respect, trust, empathy, and basic liking toward one another. The treatment has worked and the patient’s condition has stabilized. In the course of this development of a therapeutic alliance over months or years, the two parties have come to feel warmly, even lovingly, toward each other. For the moment, we can exclude situations in which there is an erotic or sexualized transference or countertransference in play, and just focus on the problem that begins to arise when a genuine friendship is established. Patient and psychiatrist have both played their societally defined roles as well as one can imagine. But over the course of time, mutual wishes for a
personal relationship have understandably, and ineluctably, come to the fore. Now the two
have a real problem.

One of the great ethics issues in 20th and 21st century psychiatry has revolved around the
issue of professional “boundaries”, which I put in quotation marks in order to problematize
the concept and because the discussion of patient/doctor boundaries has become so arid and
rigidified in recent years. The conventional wisdom is that a “boundary crossing” occurs
when a psychiatrist steps outside the usual professional role in such a way that does not
harm the patient, while a “boundary violation” involves an action outside the usual profes-
sional role but in which the patient is harmed or put at serious risk of being harmed (Gab-
bard & Nadelson, 1995). Some behaviors – such as having a sexual relationship or entering
a financial relationship with a current patient – are considered absolutely unethical and are
subject to professional discipline, such as revocation of a license to practice medicine, and
to malpractice actions. There is more debate about whether psychiatrists can ever ethically
enter a romantic or a financial relationship with a former patient, but even here there is a
trend toward tighter rules and regulations. For example, until a few years ago, the American
Psychiatric Association policies stated that a psychiatrist member of the Association needed
to wait at least two years before dating a former patient. The more recently adopted policy
essentially states “once a patient, always a patient” – and prohibits a member of the APA
from ever dating a former patient.

Much less has been said about friendship with current or former patients in written by-
laws of professional associations or in state regulations governing the practice of medicine,
but friendships between psychiatrists and patients have generally been frowned upon –
largely because they may create a “slippery slope” toward sexual, financial, or other har-
ful boundary violations. Some hospitals have written policies that prohibit psychiatrists
from ever socializing with current or former patients, and subject any psychiatrist who does
so to the possibility of disciplinary action, up to and including termination from the hospital
staff. These hospitals, in many cases, tacitly exempt certain social interactions between pa-
tients and doctors, such as those that occur at hospital fundraisers. It is ironic that the atten-
dees at such social functions often are members of a wealthy and exclusive group, often
called the “Friends of Hospital X”. However, if not endorsed by the hospital, the psychiatr-
ist, in establishing a personal friendship with a current or former patient, puts himself or
herself at significant risk of termination of employment, professional embarrassment, and
possibly even loss of a license to practice medicine.

The problem is that, in many psychiatric treatments that have gone well, patients and
their families are grateful to the physician and seek the kind of personal attachment that, in
most interpersonal relationships, are harmless and, in fact, highly desirable. Psychiatrists
routinely receive invitations to attend patients’ weddings, graduations, milestone birthday
parties, and countless other such events. They are frequently presented with gifts, some-
times ones that are handmade especially for the psychiatrist (perhaps a sweater, or piece or
art), as human expressions of gratitude and friendship. In some cases, the psychiatrist can
find a way to decline the invitation or the gift without creating hurt feelings, distancing the
patient emotionally, harming the therapeutic alliance, or placing the treatment at risk. But in
many cases, that simply isn’t possible. Declining or rejecting a gift or an invitation may do
more harm than good. In fact, accepting the invitation or gift might deepen the emotional
bond between the two parties and lead to a stronger relationship. The psychiatrist, in some
such situations, faces a troubling dilemma. Should he or she err on the side of fidelity to the
traditional professional role, thereby shielding against a possible “slippery slope” toward a
boundary violation – but putting the warm and human bond at risk? Or should he or she
take a risk by stepping outside the conventions, thereby deepening the human connection – but creating the risk that a real or perceived “boundary violation” will later harm the patient or threaten the psychiatrist’s career? This kind of scenario presents one of the core dilemmas that practicing psychiatrists currently face. Working it through can be enhanced by an understanding of the philosophy of friendship and how it might apply to contemporary psychiatric practice.

Philosophy of Friendship and Psychiatry

The philosophy of friendship has a long and storied history in the West. In the Nicomachean Ethics, Aristotle grappled with what defines the essence of friendship and made some key points that remain relevant to the current debate in philosophy and psychiatry. Aristotle talks about friendships that involve an “inequality between the parties” (e.g., between father and son) and which, in the best cases, are nonetheless “abiding and excellent” (Aristotle, 1065-1066). When each party contributes to the relationship in proportion to what each has to offer, then “in a sense arises equality, which is certainly held to be characteristic of friendship” (Aristotle, 1066). The son becomes a man, the patient gets well – and the once lopsided relationship moves onto a more equal footing. At that point, Aristotle’s commentary on the mutual love and friendship that may develop between similar individuals comes into play. Aristotle here talks about 3 distinct kinds of friendship. The first 2, which are far less desirable than the third, are rooted in pleasure and utility; when pleasure and usefulness dissolve for one or both parties in the dyad, so too does the friendship. The “perfect friendship”, on the other hand, for Aristotle is “the friendship of men who are good, and alike in virtue” (Aristotle, 1061). There is no well-considered reason that such friendship cannot develop between an emotionally attuned psychiatrist and a healthy patient over the course of a long term treatment. Such a development is a rare event, certainly, perhaps even a black swan; but it may constitute the very best outcome of a psychiatric treatment rather than be something we feared, regulate against, or punish. Aristotle writes:

It is natural that such friendships should be infrequent; for such men are rare. Further, such friendship requires time and familiarity; as the proverb says, men cannot know each other till they have ‘eaten salt together’: nor can they admit each other to friendship or be friends till each has been found lovable and been trusted by each. Those who quickly show the marks of friendship to each other wish to be friends, but are not friends unless they both are lovable and know the fact; for a wish for friendship may arise quickly, but friendship does not (Aristotle, 1061-1062).

These points Aristotle makes about friendship could be equally applied to our considerations of the patient/psychiatrist relationship. The contemporary psychotherapy and psychoanalytic literatures are rife with references to the importance of the Aristotelian ideal of a long-term emotional bond and trust between the two parties, even in light of the obvious differences between them (e.g., the fact that the patient pays the therapist). The same can be said of more recent philosophy of friendship. The great pragmatist philosopher and educator John Dewey, in his wonderful book Art as Experience, grapples with the question of how one culture absorbs the artistic contributions of a preceding culture. In his explanation of this creative and imaginative sociocultural process, he makes a comparison to the growth of a deep friendship. His description could be equally true of the therapeutic relationship in psychiatry:
The problem in question is not unlike that we daily undergo in the effort to understand another person with whom we habitually associate. All friendship is a solution of the problem. Friendship and intimate affection are not the result of information about another person even though knowledge may further their formation. But it does so only as it becomes an integral part of sympathy through the imagination. It is when the desires and aims, the interests and modes of response of another become an expansion of our own being that we understand him. We learn to see with his eyes, hear with his ears, and their results give true instruction, for they are built into our own structure (Dewey, 1934, 350).

And in a recent treatment of the philosophy of friendship by philosopher Bennett Helm (Love, Friendship, & the Self: Intimacy, Identification, & the Social Nature of Persons), we find an account of love as intimate identification between two people, and an analysis of how interpersonal emotional connectedness is essential to human flourishing, autonomy, and self-determination. Helm develops a notion of “plural agency” in which human choice and expression are constituted within relationships, the most powerful of those being loving friendships (Helm, 2010: 266-267). Once again, we could easily substitute “therapeutic alliance” for “friendship” throughout most of this work and have an extremely compelling account of what psychiatric treatment looks like at its very best.

All of which leads me back to considering how this view of human connectedness collides with the conventional view of “boundaries,” and the professional regulations around them, in the patient/psychiatrist relationship. In their training, psychiatrists are far more likely to read the work of psychiatrist Glen Gabbard than they are to read Aristotle, Dewey, or Helm. Gabbard & Nadelson (1995), representing the mainstream of the contemporary psychiatric and psychoanalytic professions, draws on Freudian concepts of transference and countertransference to describe the emotional connectedness between patient and doctor. Rooted in the Freudian tradition, he tends to see the most powerful emotional forces in the therapeutic dyad to be repetitions of problematic, traumatic early experiences. In other words, when a patient has a strong emotional or erotic reaction to a therapist, this is to be understood as “transference” – a replication of a problematic relationship in early childhood, which needs to be interpreted by the therapist and “worked through” in the course of treatment. Similarly, the psychiatrist’s deep and powerful emotional or erotic reaction to a patient is to be understood as “countertransference” – a repetition of a complex relationship in the therapist’s early life. In this mainline view, countertransference needs to be identified, managed, and never acted out. When psychiatrists do act out countertransference, they may put the patient at risk of harm or exploitation.

This kind of power dynamic in the patient/psychiatrist interaction has been thoughtfully analyzed by Alan Wertheimer in his book entitled Exploitation (1999). Real world experience has indeed taught us that a small but troublesome minority of psychiatrists do sociopathically exploit vulnerable patients for their own sexual or other selfish gratification. However, most countertransference reactions (the vast majority, in fact) are not driven or accompanied by exploitative dynamics – they are more likely to be driven by the affiliative, loving dynamics which Aristotle, Dewey, and Helm discuss. Those are not the writers that most psychiatrists read these days, however. Psychiatrists are more likely to question the possibly pathologic nature of their countertransference feelings than to accept them and elaborate upon them in order to forge a closer human connection with the patient. This is the other, and certainly more common, form of “boundary violation” in contemporary psychiatry – the psychiatrist avoids or retreats from emotional connectedness with the patient for fear of the slippery slope, exploitation of the other, and professional ruin for oneself. Although they rarely read hard-core philosophy, psychiatrists end up adhering to principles
articulated by philosopher Michael Hardimon, who authored a well-known article entitled “Role Obligations” in the *Journal of Philosophy* (1994). Hardimon argues that professional morality and ethics are rooted more in institutional and fiduciary roles than in character virtues of the human individual playing those roles.

Hardimon helps us to see the importance of identifying and considering the moral norms that govern professional roles. However, a primarily rationalistic philosophy of professional role obligations does not prevent or regulate against the development of mutual feelings or the growth of a patient/psychiatrist friendship. We also must note that psychoanalytic theory, with its emphasis on transference/countertransference dynamics, is considered outdated and largely discredited, even within the field of psychiatry itself (the field now is much more focused on cognitive neuroscience than on psychoanalytic or psychodynamic theory). And the professional regulations at the levels of hospitals, clinics, physician associations, and state licensing boards may be overly rigid, guided by out-of-date theories like classical psychoanalysis, and focused on preventing worst-case scenarios rather than developing guidelines for more ordinary situations. The open-ended views of friendship, such as those of Aristotle, Dewey, and Helm, appear to have little place in contemporary psychiatric thinking or practice.

So how might we approach the question I pose in the title of this paper? Can patients and psychiatrists be friends? We might approach it by first asking whether we wish to formulate a modern or postmodern response. Like most contemporary philosophers, I reject out of hand any absolutist answer to this or related questions – there is no metaphysical truth about the world, or any norm independent of our own human experience, that will help us here. But the modern versus post-modern question might be usefully posed as follows: can the “communicative rationality” of a philosopher like Jürgen Habermas help us to an answer? Habermas (1998) has great faith in reason and discourse. Under ideal conditions for discourse about our question (either in general, or as applies to the friendship between a particular patient and psychiatrist), Habermas might argue that we can find a rational, true answer that grows out of our discourse and normative practices.

But reason is in more trouble than Habermas appreciates. Discourse about this question on patient/psychiatrist friendship never really gets off ground because of fear of embarrassment and professional ruin. Psychiatrists are scared to talk about the real nature of their relationships with patients for fear that they will be reported to authorities, have their jobs and licenses revoked, or face media scrutiny about questionable professional practice. And so what we are really dealing with is a frightening set of postmodern dynamics around our central question. Michel Foucault’s work (1965) may tell us more than Habermas’s about the power dynamics in play here. The answer to our question, it seems, is driven more by power politics and historical contingencies than by rational discourse aimed at defining ethically sound norms.

**Clinical Pragmatism and Patient/Psychiatrist Friendship**

I am neither as sanguine as Habermas, nor as cynical as Foucault, about how to formulate an answer to the question of whether patients and psychiatrists can be friends. Neither modernist nor postmodernist forms of reasoning provide a clear and complete answer. In much of philosophical thinking and medical ethics, these two modes of reasoning stand in a dialectical relationship to each other anyway. None of us can be full-fledged modernists or post-modernists, especially when grappling with philosophical and ethical questions that have such powerful and profound real-world effects and manifestations. Here is where phi-
Losophical pragmatism can do some important conceptual and practical work for us. Clinical pragmatism provides a via media between the extremes of modernism and postmodernism. Of course, there are many different forms of philosophical pragmatism available on the contemporary scene, so I need to describe something about my own, distinguish it from other well-known versions, and show how it provides a useful lens through which we can look at the problem of whether patients and psychiatrists can be friends.

My own version of philosophical and clinical pragmatism aims to work dialectically between science and humanism, modernism and postmodernism, regulation and individual freedom. It sees each of these polar positions as critical, but inadequate, moments in a dynamic and integrative process. For example, with regard to philosophic “truth”, the version of pragmatism I advocate neither embraces wholeheartedly Habermas’s modernist ideal of a truth rooted in communicative rationality and discourse, nor Richard Rorty’s postmodernist approach (1982) which is defined by what is most expedient or imposed by those in power. With regard to the question of whether patients and psychiatrists can be friends, there is little likelihood that rational discourse will lead to a rational and consensual norm, in part because the climate of shame and fear about this subject shut down the open and honest discourse which Habermas’s theory requires. On the other hand, it would be nihilistic to swing the pendulum to Rorty’s extreme and accept that there are no guiding principles in play here other than expediency and capricious decisions by those in power. In other words, in the current environment, rational discourse cannot lead to a well thought out position on patient/psychiatrist friendship in general or on the acceptability of a particular patient/psychiatrist friendship, as the conversation never gets off the ground. On the other hand, willy-nilly, local decisions by those in power (such as state medical boards or hospital administrators) about the general or the particular question are unlikely to be informed by a nuanced philosophy of friendship or a careful consideration of the nature of a particular friendship between two people.

The pragmatist begins from the position that this tension exists and is never fully resolvable. As such, the psychiatrist must acknowledge and learn to live and practice within an ambiguous space in which there are equally strong pulls toward unfettered human friendship and toward professional fidelity and regulation. In order to understand the nuances of this situation and successfully negotiate its challenge, the psychiatrist needs to engage in philosophical and moral self-reflection, personal psychotherapy, consultation with colleagues and mentors within confidential and privileged relationships, and possibly even engagement of attorneys, ethicists, and risk management specialists. Even for psychiatrists who make a conscious choice to avoid even approaching an Aristotelian form of friendship with patients, the risks are real. Patient/psychiatrist dyads very often lead in completely surprising and unanticipated directions, as the two get to know each other over time and, to use Aristotle’s phrase, “eat salt together”. Most experienced therapists, working with patients who have gotten well and remain in long-term treatment, realize that there is no way to control or regulate their feelings simply by making a conscious determination to function strictly in accordance with professional guidelines and regulations. Friendship ultimately is unavoidable in many cases. The question is not whether it will develop, but how it can be managed in a way that protects and enhances the life of the patient and, hopefully, the psychiatrist as well.

Patient/psychiatrist friendship, whether during or after the course of treatment, may never be a fully co-equal friendship. Even months or years after the termination of treatment, a strong argument could be made that the psychiatrist still has a more robust moral obligation to protect and serve the best interests of the former patient than the former pa-
tient does toward the psychiatrist. Again, as per Aristotle, this relative inequality does not mean the friendship cannot be “abiding and excellent” and thereby approach (or fully rise to) the essence of Aristotle’s “perfect friendship”. In fact, we may go a step beyond Aristotle to fashion an argument that no friendship is ever fully co-equal, as the inherent differences between two individuals immediately and necessarily sets up a substantive inequality. One friend may be wealthier than another and thereby be in an empowered situation (or, conversely, be subject to jealousy and exploitation by the less moneyed friend). One friend may have a richer family or social life than the other, thereby establishing significant emotional needs and opportunities for each. One friend may develop a terminal illness while the other remains healthy, again setting up logistical and emotional factors that can make the friendship unequal at different times and in different ways. We no more want to say that such ordinary interpersonal situations detract from the possibility or reality of Aristotelian perfect friendship than the situation in which a psychiatrist and his or her former patient develop a relationship that transcends the usual professional structure.

The pragmatist viewpoint on this issue is that there is no absolute definition of friendship in general or in the patient/psychiatrist situation in particular. Being a friend to a patient may, for the psychiatrist, involve attending a graduation or wedding or other special life event; it may involve accepting a gift from a patient (or, in rare cases) giving a gift to a patient; it may (also in rare cases) involve “friending” a patient on Facebook or another online social networking site, a scenario and challenge I recently published a paper about in the Journal of Medical Ethics (Brendel, 2009). Most importantly for our current purposes, though, a patient/psychiatrist friendship may approach or fully develop into an Aristotelian perfect friendship between two essentially good, virtuous individuals. And the flowering of this friendship may actually represent, or at least be compatible with, the very best that psychiatric treatment has to offer. The pragmatist viewpoint further states that there should be no prima facie prohibitions on the development of these relationships, but that the development of such relationships should occur in the context of a careful consideration by the psychiatrist, the (current or former) patient, and perhaps others (including hospital administrators, professional societies, and licensing boards) of 8 factors which I will presently define.

In some of my past work (Brendel, 2006), I have described the tension psychiatrists experience between working as scientists who aim to diagnose, categorize, and treat patients in accordance with “evidence-based” medicine, while at the same time working as humanists who deeply understand and work with each patient’s unique interpersonal, emotional, and existential situation. Working within this tension is one of the great challenges and thrills of modern psychiatric practice, and in my book Healing Psychiatry, I delineated a pragmatic model for handling the tension between science and humanism. In this paper, I move on to address this other core tension and dilemma that psychiatrists face, which entails negotiating the obligations of the professional role and the critical importance of forging a human alliance and, perhaps, a friendship with the patient.

In Healing Psychiatry, I defined the “4 p’s” of clinical pragmatism as the key factors in a conceptual and practical structure for good psychiatric practice. Those 4 p’s involved the practical aspects of all psychiatric diagnosis and treatment; the pluralistic nature of the tools that psychiatrists use in diagnosing and treating complex, mental disorders; the participatory nature of diagnosis and treatment, with the patient sharing actively in decision making; and the provisional nature of diagnosis and treatment in psychiatry, given the complexity of the human mind and brain. These 4 p’s of clinical pragmatism were rooted in the thinking of classical American pragmatists, including Charles Sanders Peirce (1904), William James...
(1909), and John Dewey (1929). They are also strongly influenced by the work of more contemporary pragmatic philosophers and bioethicists, such as Christopher Tollefsen (2000) and Glenn McGee (2003). For example, the fallibilism of Peirce, the pluralism of James, and the participatory democratic attitude of Dewey all combine with their privileging of good practical results in many forms of life – and help to define a structure for the 4 p’s.

These thinkers urge us to pay close attention to the practical applications of scientific study, the multiplicity of phenomena that render such study useful, the participation of many individuals in formulating collaborative and workable hypotheses, and the provisional nature of scientific understanding. Along these lines, pragmatism in modern-day psychiatry can be understood as a clinical sensibility and methodology that aims for favorable treatment outcomes for patients by respecting the practical, pluralistic, participatory, and provisional aspects of psychiatric explanation. Clinical pragmatism demands that psychiatrists have the skill and flexibility to employ multiple explanatory concepts (spanning the entire biopsychosocial spectrum) in an interactive and collaborative process with patients, which under most circumstances can lead to open-ended but useful clinical explanations and treatment plans (Brendel, 2006: 5-6).

The subtitle of Healing Psychiatry is Bridging the Science/Humanism Divide. For the topic at hand in this paper, we might transmute that to Bridging the Regulation/Friendship Divide. In addressing the question of patient/psychiatrist friendship, I invoke the 4 p’s from Healing Psychiatry and transform them for the current purpose, then add another 4 p’s that also must be seriously considered in this context. Thus, the 8 p’s constituting the pragmatist viewpoint on patient/psychiatrist friendship can be formulated as follows. Whenever a psychiatrist notices the incipient development of a friendship (widely considered) with a patient, he or she should think carefully about the following 8 questions:

**Practicality:** Our question cannot be solved on a purely theoretical or conceptual level, as emotion-driven, textured, real human relationships are not conducted on that plane. Consistent with the most basic tenet of philosophical pragmatism, we need to ask whether such relationships can work in the real world. As mentioned, psychiatrists may make a practical decision to attempt to avoid the development of an Aristotelian friendship within clinical practice, but such an attempt may fail and, if it succeeds, may rob the practice of an important human factor. That would be one crude form of pragmatist approach to the problem of patient/psychiatrist friendship. The deeper pragmatist point here, however, is that the conceptual question must be answered on the basis of practice rather than principles.

**Pluralism:** William James’s work, ranging from his brilliant work A Pluralistic Universe to his Varieties of Religious Experience, embodies the great pragmatist point about the diversity and messiness of the universe – metaphysically, epistemologically, existentially, and ethically. Building on James’s seminal work and its modern iterations in scholarship and cultural trends regarding pluralism, my view in the current context is that friendship takes many forms and can occur between many different types of people, notwithstanding superficial facts about people which might lead us to think that equal friendship in Aristotle’s sense is not possible. Friendship between parent and child, professor and student, clergyman and congregant, physician and patient – all of these are possible for the pragmatist. Legislation, regulation, oversight, workplace rules cannot prevent their development.

**Participation of Patient:** In a non-hierarchical pragmatist world, neither psychiatrist nor patient is in a privileged position to decide on the nature of their relationship alone. Friendship is co-constructed between two autonomous adults acting as plural agents, in Helm’s
sense of the term. Neither party, and certainly not any outside third party, can decide alone whether to regard or call the relationship a friendship. The participatory approach is consistent with, and reinforces, the previous points about the practical and pluralistic nature of the question and the friendship relationship itself.

**Provisionality:** Friendships are not perfect and are not set in stone. Over the course of time, they transform themselves in unanticipated and unpredictable ways. Aristotle discusses an ideal “perfect friendship”, but the pragmatist will probably part ways with him to say that friendships are fallible and ever changing. A patient/psychiatrist dyad may transform itself into a friendship between two people who used to work together professionally, and from there the friendship may grow and prosper, or it may fade and wither. The question of whether it can grow into more than a friendship – perhaps a romance or a business partnership – is more complicated because of the traditional ethics prohibitions in this area. The pragmatist does not rule out the possibility of such a transformation on theoretical grounds, but will look to some of the other 4 p’s for guidance about whether and how this may be safe and practical.

**Professionalism:** The psychiatrist with an open-minded understanding of the practical, pluralistic, participatory, and provisional aspects of friendships – and a receptivity to the possibility of Aristotelian friendship growing out of a patient/doctor relationship – must be knowledgeable and reflective about the professional norms of the practice community of which he or she is a member. Rules about avoidance of exploitation of a vulnerable patient should be considered inviolable. But professionalism is more a habit of thinking and self-reflection than a set of clear and distinct rules in most of the situations we are considering today, in which there is no exploitation but the usual patient/doctor boundaries may become fuzzy as each individual autonomously chooses to get closer and engage in activities that are outside the usual professional bounds.

**Protection of Patient and Psychiatrist:** Despite all of these considerations, the fact remains that it is difficult – if not impossible – to guarantee that someone will never get hurt as the result of a friendship between a psychiatrist and a former patient. This fact is part of the provisionality of all such friendship. Some psychiatrists will choose to make an active point of avoiding such situations as much as they can. But when feelings begin to develop between the two parties, both of them (but especially the psychiatrist) must be careful to take protective steps. The psychiatrist must assure that the patient has another capable clinician looking after any and all treatment needs, for example. The psychiatrist also owes himself or herself a measure of self-protection – this may involve consulting with an attorney or ethics committee to discuss the propriety of the friendship, and documenting those discussions in writing in case of later legal or regulatory trouble.

**Peer review:** This last point regarding self-protection can be understood under the broader rubric of peer review. Here is where we may return to consider the plausibility of Habermas’s notion of communicative rationality via discourse. Can a group of professional peers discuss the question about a particular patient/psychiatrist friendship in a safe, confidential, open-minded setting – and thereby come to a rational consensus about an appropriate course of action? And can other convened groups – such as a hospital ethics committee or a state medical board – discuss these questions in a rational discourse that leads to a consensus that rises to the level of truth, or at least normativity? The psychiatrist confronting the question of whether he or she can develop a friendship with a patient must consider and engage in some form of peer review, though such discussion forums are few and far between because of the fear and shame that surround the issue.
Privacy: Ultimately, the two individuals engaged in the friendship must decide on what they wish their relationship to be, and the pragmatist will allow them to make this work by respecting their autonomy and personhood. The question here is whether the medical profession or society more broadly should regulate this kind of relationship between a psychiatrist and a patient, in order to protect certain principles or tenets. For example, some hospital policies prohibit this kind of relationship, mainly to defend the hospital against possible future lawsuits or negative media attention. State regulators may choose to revoke a practitioner’s license on the basis of such a friendship in order to protect the integrity and reputation of the medical profession. In the battle over privacy, the individual psychiatrist and the policy maker alike must grapple with the question of whether the individual person’s privacy rights are greater or lesser than the interests of the medical profession and the state. The pragmatist does not have a ready-made position on this question, but believes that the tension must be grappled with in a fair, open-minded, and non-dogmatic fashion.

Conclusion

There are more questions than answers about the feasibility of friendship between contemporary psychiatrists and those they serve in professional practice. Can patients and psychiatrists be friends? From a pragmatic standpoint, if they choose to make it work, then yes they can. A long-term psychiatric treatment relationship may, in fact, be a favorable breeding ground for Aristotelian perfect friendship and beyond. At the same time, we know that such friendship involves significant risk and may come at a high cost for patient and psychiatrist alike. We must ask ourselves whether such friendship really can work in light of the traditional, psychoanalytically based view of patient/doctor boundaries and all the rules, regulations, and forms of disciplinary action and shaming that arise around that notion of boundaries. William James once said that “wherever you are it is your friends who make your world.” We know how important friendship, in all its manifestations, is for human flourishing. We have known that since Aristotle and well before him. What we do not yet know, in our technocratic and highly regulated medical world, is whether psychiatrists are to be barred from friendships with certain other autonomous human beings with whom they may develop very deep and meaningful relationships.

References


A Symposium on Richard Bernstein’s *The Pragmatic Turn*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2010

Organizer: Roberto Frega
Roberto Frega

*Richard Bernstein and the challenges of a broadened pragmatism*

Richard Bernstein is among the pragmatist philosophers that have most significantly contributed to the advancement of a philosophical conversation between the American and the European traditions. His work has greatly helped dismantling the boundaries that in the last decades had been erected between philosophical traditions. It is therefore with the greatest pleasure that *The European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy* inaugurates his series of book symposium with Bernstein’s book *The Pragmatic Turn*. Bernstein’s book is striking for his willingness to resist any temptation to appropriate pragmatism as being exclusively American. In reminding us of the commonalities among a wide range of philosophers engaged in a now successful pragmatic turn, Bernstein accomplishes a step forward in making pragmatism a living tradition, freed from any geographical specification or historical belonging. In opening this discussion about his last book, I will confine myself to some remarks concerning the way in which Bernstein conceives the relationships between the American pragmatist tradition and the wider pragmatic turn to which his book is devoted.

As the other great pragmatist thinkers of his generation, Richard Bernstein is a philosopher committed to an ecumenical task: to show that pragmatism is a living philosophical koiné. In order to do this he works incessantly at broadening its boundaries and at setting up philosophical conversations with other philosophical traditions. Each of the great figures of his generation has invented his own style for doing this. Richard Rorty has insistingly explored the affinities with Continental, and often literary and postmodern paths in philosophy. Joseph Margolis has offered philosophical frescoes of how the analytical, the continental and the pragmatist philosophies are conceptually entangled and historically dependent upon the same philosophical sources. Hilary Putnam has provided countless examples of how pragmatism could provide answers to problems set within the recent analytical tradition. Among these thinkers, Bernstein is the only one that has not started his career as an analytical philosopher, and his works has been pragmatic since its beginning. Yet, since at least his book *Praxis and Action* (1971), we find in Bernstein’s work a never exhausted desire to set up new fronts of conversation. He has established and consolidate pragmatism through a host of conversational engagements: with Hannah Arendt, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Alasdair MacIntyre, Jacques Derrida, Jürgen Habermas and many others.

A central question that emerges through Bernstein’s work, and especially in his last book, concerns inevitably the identity of the pragmatist tradition and its conceptual boundaries. In this perspective, what strikes me as paradoxical in Bernstein efforts – of course the fault is not his – is the apparent difficulty to seat pragmatism on its own foot. Through his conversation with the recent and somehow anomalous versions of “Kantian” and of “analytical” pragmatisms, Bernstein shows the tensions and the difficulties that seem to plague any effort at reclaiming the pragmatist tradition. This theme becomes compelling and explosive under Bernstein writing precisely because of his conversational openness and commitment to enlarge the pragmatist family. Bernstein takes his interlocutors extremely seriously, explores in depth their conceptual resources, tries to find all the possible lines of
convergence between them and the pragmatist tradition. But at the end of the journey we are left with the feeling of irreconcilable distances. Any reader familiar with the pragmatist tradition cannot but share Bernstein’s candid remark that “Brandom has a distorted view of the American pragmatists and his relation to them” (Bernstein 2010: 230) and that “Habermas’s ‘Kantian pragmatism’ is an unstable stopping stage” (199), so that “one wishes that Habermas had been less ‘Kantian’ and more ‘pragmatic’” (197). Similar if not stronger remarks could be made (and have been made) about the pragmatic character of Quine, Davidson, and McDowell philosophies. Yet the issue is timely and Bernstein’s insistence at tackling with it has to be praised. The issue taken on by Bernstein, and the way he does it, are of the greatest importance not for mere parochial reasons concerning the disciplinary, academic boundaries of one’s own philosophical garden.

What is involved in the philosophical conversations engaged by Bernstein is therefore the very possibility to establish pragmatism as a living contemporary tradition in philosophy. As all other authors that have striven with this issue, Bernstein knows that he is trapped in a double bind: the more one stays close to the Classical tradition, the more pragmatism appears as a self-consistent but marginalized tradition. On the other side, the more one opens its boundaries, the more the pragmatist label becomes successful but the more it risks to lose its distinctiveness and philosophical significance. Accordingly, there are two main ways for dealing with the question of the pragmatist heritage: the first consists in insisting on the continuities between what is being called pragmatism today and the thought of the ‘founding fathers’: the Classical American pragmatists. Following this line of thought we are lead to ask ourselves what is the meaning of pragmatism, what its distinguishing traits, what its conceptual core, what the living actuality of the founding fathers. The second consists in acknowledging a wide convergence of different traditions on themes anticipated by the pragmatists but developed also by other philosophers. At a time where Pragmatism’s Readers featuring contributions from Rudolph Carnap and Hans Reichenbach are being published, and where pragmatism is sometimes taken to refer to any conception that privileges pragmatic over semantic approaches to language, the question of the limits of conversation should be considered to be something more than a terminological quarrel over the right to use a label. In Bernstein’s words, if “the expression ‘pragmatism’ is like an accordion” (11), then its meaning should be acknowledged to vary, even greatly, but nevertheless within limits. Here lies, in my opinion, the central question of the relationship between the ‘pragmatist’ and the ‘pragmatic’ that is at the heart of Bernstein’s book.

Bernstein’s strategy in tackling with this issue consists in insisting on the philosophical priority of the ‘pragmatic’ over the ‘pragmatist’. He tells a narrative made out of a plurality of voices, all characterized by their allegiance to a pragmatic turn, of which pragmatism is merely one of the several components – although probably the most important. The pragmatic turn is characterized by the willingness to acknowledge a decisive explanatory function to social practices in epistemology and metaphysics. The pragmatic turn is therefore, more precisely, a practice turn. With respect to this wide family, the question remains open to determine what has been the specific contribution of pragmatism, say as against the wittgensteinian or the heideggerian. Bernstein’s answer is mixed. He starts his book with three chapters on the classical pragmatists as if to recall the philosophical unity of this movement.
and its seminal function in giving rise to the pragmatic turn—the pragmatist core of the pragmatic turn. Yet in what follows the weight of the pragmatic ‘sea change’ is put nearly exclusively on Peirce’s shoulders. Bernstein acknowledges Peirce’s anti-Cartesianism as the founding moment of pragmatism. “Peirce opened up a new way of thinking that is still being pursued today in novel and exciting ways by all those who have taken the pragmatic turn” (52). What is, according to Bernstein, this “sea change” initiated by Peirce? Quite surprisingly, it is neither the introduction of the pragmatic maxim, nor the development of a theory of rationality as inquiry, nor his fallibilism. It is, rather, the fact of having found a via media between a dogmatic appeal to the given and an unacceptable frictionless coher-entism. Defining pragmatism through this epistemological thesis is the strategic move that drives the rest of the book: it provides the starting point for a narrative of pragmatism aimed at emphasizing its analytical developments: Quine, Sellars, Davidson, Mc Dowell, Brandom, Habermas. Unsurprisingly, the unfolding of the book will leave quite unex-plained the role played by the other pragmatists – Dewey, James, and Mead – in the accomp-lishing of the pragmatic turn: James contribution remains quite exclusively limited to the ethical, while Dewey’s is focused on the political. The relevance of both authors in the succeeding chapters remains surprisingly modest.

This Peircean narrative proposed by Bernstein is certainly historically accurate, philo-sophically legitimate and strategically wise for a lot of reasons that the reader discovers while making his way through the book. Yet it puzzles me for at least two reasons. The first is that this narrative gives a very strong explanatory privilege to the role of language at the expenses of the role of social practices. It reduces the philosophical relevance of pragmat-ism to its contribution “in the way of words”, as Bernstein himself likes to say using a sel-larsian formula. The second is that, as I have recalled above, Bernstein seems to be the first to be unconvinced by this narrative, when he acknowledges Brandom’s distorted view of pragmatism and Habermas’ excessive Kantianism. Given the philosophical tastes of Bernstein, one would have expected him to deploy a more pluralistic narrative.

So here is the question I would like to address him: is not his account of pragmatism too much unbalanced towards these analytical and Kantian versions which have certainly a legitimate place at the borders of the pragmatist family but cannot be taken to define neither its historical nor its conceptual core? And secondly, if we accept to define pragmatism as an heterogeneous ensemble of thinkers united by family resemblances, don’t he think that there still are some dominant, pervasive traits that could define the core of this philosophi-cal tradition, and that cannot be limited to the Peircean move he sets at the start of his book? Or is he willing to drown pragmatism altogether within the pragmatic turn? A dis-ingenuous reader might in fact be tempted to think that what Bernstein book teaches us is that pragmatism has contributed to philosophy either developing interesting theories that have no currency today or to adumbrating yesterday answers to questions that are being asked today at the cutting edge of philosophy. My question, in the end, amounts to ask whether according to him there is still a relevant sense in which we can speak of a pragmatist tradi-tion alive today—and if yes how he would define its contours, or whether he thinks that it is enough to say that we should be content with acknowledging the existence of an extended pragmatic family, to which philosophers subscribe only on an individual basis.

I ask this question because I have the feeling that although the factual impossibility to provide a non controversial definition of pragmatism, I see powerful family resemblances within its members, and I have the feeling that by understating these resemblances we miss something important of the cultural and philosophical heritage of pragmatism. This heritage has to do with the peculiar way the pragmatist took social practices seriously. When the
pragmatists ‘discovered’ the world of the social practices, what they had in mind where in fact historical processes, real communities, social factors, educational and transformational movements. Their appeal to social practices was much more radical than most of the ‘practice’ talk or of the ‘social’ talk that characterizes the philosophers that Bernstein addresses through his conversations. In a significantly different way, since the ‘way of words’ has taken on the philosophical scene, the social has been reduced to the inter-subjective, and practices have been reduced to discourses. Similarly, as Bernstein himself acknowledges, the present philosophical culture is exposed to idealistic temptations that impoverish our understanding of human experience. And I wonder whether the pragmatic philosophies of Quine, Sellars, Davidson, McDowell, Brandom and Habermas – their fundamental philosophical importance notwithstanding – really help us in vindicating the philosophical importance of the social practices; I’m asking, in other words, whether they can really help us in making philosophical sense of experience after the linguistic turn or whether they are not simply pursuing a different philosophical project. The philosophical tension between language and experience is part of our philosophical culture, and as such it traverses all Bernstein’s book and remains unresolved. This is probably the sign that, as Ramon del Castillo concludes in his contribution to this symposia, the pragmatic turn is still, at least partially, a task still before us. A task that, nevertheless, Bernstein’s book help us achieve a step further.
James R. O’Shea

Objective Truth and the Practice Relativity of Justification in the Pragmatic Turn

In the beginning, as they say, was the ‘pragmatic maxim’ of Peirce and James. Peirce’s early formulation of the maxim in “How to Make Our Ideas Clear” ran as follows:

Consider what effects, which might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object (Peirce, 1878: 132; cf. Bernstein, 2010: 2–3, and O’Shea, 2008: 208–13).

At its core, pragmatism thus originated as a method for clarifying the conceptual meaning or content of any term or idea. A common theme running throughout the subsequent attempted clarifications of this maxim or ‘principle of pragmatism’, by both Peirce and James (cf. James, 1898: 347–9, and 1907: 377–8), was the idea that, as Peirce puts it, “there is no distinction of meaning so fine as to consist in anything but a possible difference of practice” (1992: 131). Of particular importance for determining the conceptual content of a given belief or assertion, on this pragmatist outlook, is the role that such beliefs and their constituent concepts play (Peirce emphasizes inference and James the “leadings” of ideas in experience and action) within what Sellars would later call the “logical space of reasons” (cf. Bernstein, 2010: 49).

Since questions concerning the rational justification and cognitive merits of a given assertion will of course depend partly upon an assessment of its meaning; and since meaning, for the pragmatist (let us simplify), is determined by inferential and other roles within a practice; it is not surprising that there is generally a tight connection for pragmatists between issues of rational justification on the one hand, and the particularities of practice on the other. Furthermore, when the pragmatic maxim with its broadly inferentialist implications for meaning and justification is then applied to the concept of truth, it is also not surprising to find Peirce and James and their pragmatist descendants tightly linking (in some cases identifying) truth with what is justifiable or ‘good in the way of belief’ relative to the normative standards of given practices and working conceptual frameworks. However, since pragmatists themselves emphasize that such normative standards and such working frameworks are plural and often conflicting (perhaps in some cases incommensurable), there has been a perennial tension within pragmatism between the relativity to practices of meaning and justification on the one hand, and our deep-seated and seemingly warranted beliefs in the objectivity of truth on the other. In “Sources of Pluralism in William James” (2000) I argued that these two tenets were explored in philosophically groundbreaking but ultimately not entirely satisfactory ways in James’s own ‘conceptual scheme pluralism’.

Throughout the impressive range and depth of his outstanding new book, The Pragmatic Turn (2010), Richard Bernstein insightfully explores the philosophical consequences of

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1 Throughout this paper I adopt the practice common among philosophers of using ‘single quotation marks’ for mentioning items and for ‘scare-quotes’, while reserving “double quotation marks” for actual quotations from authors.
this pragmatist outlook for past and present theories of meaning, truth, and justification, from the classical pragmatists through Hegel and Sellars to Habermas, Rorty, Putnam, Davidson, Brandom, McDowell, and other recent thinkers. In particular a central theme in this book, as in his earlier Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis (1983), is Bernstein’s contention that the “pragmatists provide a philosophical orientation that is truly beyond the sterile opposition (and oscillation) between objectivism and relativism” (Bernstein, 2010: 29; cf. 53–5).

However, in one of the most insightful chapters of the book, chapter 5 on “Pragmatism, Objectivity, and Truth”, Bernstein shows himself to be well aware that what he here cites as a virtue of pragmatism has also always been, and continues to be, a problem for pragmatists, perhaps the deepest and most persistent problem of all. What follows are some remarks on Bernstein’s most recent treatment of this difficult problem: that is, the problem of how those of us who have taken the ‘pragmatic turn’ can best account for our deep-seated intuitions concerning truth and objectivity in light of the definitive pragmatist emphasis on the practice relativity of meaning and justification. This is a problem that may well be “a progressive narrative” within the pragmatist tradition, as Bernstein argues (2010: 123).

However, the difficulties remain pervasive enough to make it hard to see how exactly one should take the claim that the pragmatic turn has provided a philosophical orientation that is truly beyond the opposition and oscillation between intuitions concerning the objectivity and the practice relativity of our judgments. At several points in what follows I will use Sellars’ outlook as a helpfully shared (though of course not an entirely agreed) frame of reference.

In chapter 5 and elsewhere in the book, Bernstein helpfully portrays the “interminable oscillation” between, on the one hand, those philosophers who by temperament (in James’s sense) have the “realistic intuition” that “there is a reality ‘out there’ that is independent of any of our subjective beliefs”, and according to whom our aim is to “achieve objective knowledge” that “corresponds to” (107) and “must somehow correctly represent this objective reality” (109). And on the other hand, there are “those who argue that this way of positing the problem leads to dead-ends and aporias,” for despite “the many important differences among Wittgenstein, Quine, Davidson, Sellars, Rorty, McDowell, Brandom (and many others), they all contribute to undermining our confidence in any of the traditional correspondence theories” (109). On this latter view, it seems, if “we are to give a proper account of objectivity, we must give up on any and all forms of representationalism; we must appeal to intersubjective (or better social) justificatory practices” (109). Having

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2 I have explored pockets of the same territory, but frankly without the same depth of knowledge that Bernstein possesses of either the pragmatist tradition or the phenomenological tradition, in my 2008 and 2000. Having now read Bernstein’s The Pragmatic Turn, however, I am pleased by the fact (or so it seems to me) that so much of what I think about the history of American philosophy seems to be in harmony with the views of someone who really knows what he is talking about, and who has been articulating many of the insights of the more recent ‘New Pragmatists’ for over half a century. In particular my brief comparisons between the early Peirce and Sellars on inferentialism and the myth of the given in my 2008 express views that were already anticipated by Bernstein in his 1964 article on “Peirce’s Theory of Perception” and are now further developed in multiple locations in The Pragmatic Turn (e.g., pp. 27, 46–9, 129–38), among other places.

Embarrassingly, however, I omitted to cite Bernstein either in those works or in my book on Sellars (2007), despite the fact that as a graduate student in the 1980s I had read and profited from Bernstein’s thoroughgoing 1966 examination of Sellars’ philosophy. The latter was the first full scale critical study of Sellars’ entire systematic views up to that time, and having now re-read those articles of Bernstein – and having myself in recent years acquired a thorough knowledge of Sellars’ philosophy – I am again impressed by the accuracy and critical insights of Bernstein’s views in comparison with some more recent commentators on Sellars. I hope that with this opportunity I can make at least partial amends for my earlier omissions.

3 Hereafter page references without name or date are to Bernstein’s The Pragmatic Turn (2010).
swung this way, however, now “the pendulum swings back” again. For the “champions of objectivist or realist intuitions” argue that the latter social-justificatory reconceptions of truth and objectivity fail to capture the plausible senses in which our judgments are (as McDowell puts it) *answerable to the world*, not just answerable to our partners in the social conversation (109–10). This nicely sets up the basic oscillation (of course there are many different issues raised within it), and I think Bernstein has done an important service in stressing both the importance and the centrality of this issue for those philosophers who have taken the pragmatic turn.

However, for anyone like myself who has taken the pragmatic turn, some of Bernstein’s particular remarks about the issue of “correspondence to the objective facts” (108), in setting up the oscillation, should be unsettling. For Bernstein asserts, in his own voice it seems, that “in many straightforward cases” we can “just look and see” that, for example, “it is now raining outside”; and that in such cases we can “even say that there is a direct comparison between my statement and the reality to which it refers. ‘Correspondence’ or ‘agreement’ works in such straightforward, noncontroversial instances. . .” (108). Here I think Bernstein’s robust common sense threatens to lead him astray and to get the better of his more reflective pragmatist insights – particularly in relation to his welcome pragmatist embrace of Sellars’ account of the Myth of the Given. For Bernstein immediately goes on to contrast the above “noncontroversial” cases of simple perceptual correspondence with “more complicated cases of philosophical, scientific, mathematical, or historical assertions” (moral assertions would also usually figure prominently in such a list), and he states: “Here we can’t simply look and see; rather, we are required to give reasons to support our claims about what is objectively true” (108).

But of course the central lesson of the pragmatist, Kantian, and neo-Hegelian rejection of the Given accepted by Sellars, Rorty, McDowell, Brandom, and by Bernstein himself (cf., in particular, pp. 50–2, including endnote 24), is that even in the case of “straightforward” perceptual knowledge “we are required to give reasons”; or more accurately, for such perceptual responses to constitute the cognition of any object at all, the perceiver must be such as to be able to rationally respond to challenges and give reasons if the question arises – that is, as Bernstein admits concerning the “more complicated” cases, “to support our claims about what is objectively true”. “Noncontroversial” instances of direct perceptual knowledge of the world are possible, on this view, only if the very contents of our non-inferential perceptual ‘takings’ are conceptually structured contents (or in the case of animals and infants, are perhaps proto-conceptual contents). And the possession of conceptual content in general for the pragmatist, as we have seen, depends upon our responses having been shaped by an inferentially structured practice or “form of life”; a logical space of reason-giving. On this both Peirce and the Sellarsians – and I would think Bernstein – all agree.

Perhaps the reason that Bernstein is inclined to make this sort of slip (as it seems to me) in relation to “noncontroversial” perceptual knowledge has to do with his interesting view that Peirce’s conception of *Secondness*, “which acknowledges the brute compulsiveness of experience” (52), “helps to undercut much of the sterile debate about realism and antirealism in contemporary philosophy” (136). As Bernstein puts this point quite strongly in chapter 6, “Experience after the Linguistic Turn”:

I don’t think we need anything more than Secondness to do justice to what philosophers call their ‘realistic intuitions’. We do not need to reify a realm of facts that exist independently of any language, thought, or inquiry. Peirce does justice to the fallibility and
openness of all justificatory practices and inquiry without losing touch with a reality ‘that is independent of vagaries of me and you’ (Peirce 1992, p. 52). Contrary to the prevailing prejudice that the linguistic turn displaces old-fashioned talk about experience, Peirce’s conception of experience helps us to escape from some of the dead-ends of the linguistic turn (136).

The claim in the first sentence is too strong. For one thing, it underplays the importance placed by Bernstein himself in the preceding chapter 5 (i.e., on “Pragmatism, Objectivity, and Truth”) on the “progressive narrative” that he shows stretches from Peirce up to Robert Brandom’s more recent linguistic conception of the necessary structural form of objectivity, in chapter 8 of Making It Explicit. In Bernstein’s chapter 5, Brandom’s account emerges from the fray of recent pragmatist accounts as what Bernstein clearly seems to regard (given his criticisms of the other neo-pragmatist candidates in that chapter) as a most promising and “robust pragmatic understanding of justification, truth, intersubjectivity, and objectivity” (122–3). By clear implication Bernstein regards Brandom’s account as the general sort of account, at the conceptual level of the ‘space of reasons’ (cf. Peirce’s ‘Thirdness’), that Bernstein thinks is needed in order to handle the central ‘oscillation’ between pragmatic relativity and objective realism.

There is an important philosophical reason why we thus need more than Secondness “to do justice to what philosophers call their ‘realistic intuitions’,” although I do want to agree with Bernstein on the importance of the role played by Peircean Secondness as “the brute constraining force of experience” (134). Bernstein expresses the important truth in the idea of the “brute compulsiveness” of experience this way: “Acknowledgement of this bruteness – the way experience ‘says NO!’ – is required to make sense of the self-corrective character of inquiry and experimentation” (134). But of course as Bernstein is well aware, in rejecting the Myth of the Given both Peirce and Sellars hold that “as soon as we raise the question, ‘What constrains us?’ we are dealing with Thirdness” (135), i.e., with inferentially articulable conceptual content, which is what in Peirce corresponds to the normative-epistemic dimension of the Sellarsian ‘space of reasons’. For the question of what it is in reality that our experience forces us to somehow accommodate in the process of self-correcting empirical inquiry depends entirely in this respect on the concepts that constitute this aspect of our direct perceptual experiences as cognitions of objects. All of the pragmatists, as far as I know, accept this point from Kant. Certainly Sellars and Peirce do, and so, I think, does Bernstein. But of course what the proper and steady recognition of this point immediately does is to land us right back – ‘Secondness’, ‘Thirdness’ and all – to the fundamental problem of making sense of a properly pragmatist account of objectivity in the face of the plurality of ‘spaces’ of reason and the relativity to practices of meaning and justification.

John McDowell’s Mind and World is in effect a sophisticated metaphilosophical attempt – although he would not put it this way – to intelligibly free ourselves to recognize that all that is needed for an adequate account of objectivity (or of the ‘objective purport’ of our concepts) is to recognize that our conceptual activity within the space of reasons (cf. Peirce’s Thirdness), when things go right, is a passively elicited (cf. Peirce’s Secondness) direct openness to the structure of facts that obtain in the world. This is an important recent outlook on the problem of objectivity, although Bernstein indicates that he does “not think that McDowell thus far has provided more than hints about how” we are “to rethink the concept of nature in a way that shows how it is continuous with the higher reaches of rationality and thought” (102). At any rate, it is certainly clear that an appeal to the brute constraining element or Secondness of experience is not sufficient to address the key ‘realist’
questions concerning how we are to make intelligible to ourselves the objective truth of any given experience or judgment within any given ‘space of reasons’, given the facts of plurality and relativity to practices that Bernstein and I agree are put centre stage by the pragmatists.

As Bernstein explains (110-116), Peirce of course also had a different kind of pragmatist answer to the problem of objective reality, which we may call the ideal long run view. Thus Peirce contends that “human opinion universally tends in the long run to a definite form, which is the truth,” and that the “real, then, is that which, sooner or later, information and reasoning would finally result in, and which is therefore independent of the vagaries of me and you” (Peirce, 1992: 89, 52, quoted in Bernstein 2010: 111). A version of this view was also defended by Sellars (1967, chapter 5, cf. Jay Rosenberg, 2007), and more recently and fully by Cheryl Misak in Truth and the End of Inquiry: A Peircean Account of Truth (1991; cf. 2007).

In Sellars, put brusquely (cf. O’Shea 2007, chapter 6, for details), this took the form, firstly, of a general account of truth as correct semantic assertibility relative to the rules of any given conceptual framework or ‘language game’. This comprehensive aspect of his account is motivated by Sellars’ general pragmatist outlook on meaning, truth, and justification along the lines crudely sketched above but developed admirably by Bernstein throughout his book. Interestingly, in this first respect Sellars developed a broadly pluralist conception concerning the different domains of truth, according to which the unified notion of truth as correct semantic assertibility consists in different properties in different regions of human experience and inquiry. For example (again, roughly put), in mathematics truth is provability, Sellars suggests; in morality truth is basically consilience with intersubjectively instituted communal ‘oughts’, including the problematic regulative ideal of a community of all rational beings (see O’Shea, 2007: chapter 7 for details); and in relation to empirical “matters-of-fact” truth consists in a representational correspondence to the world (more on this presently). It is in relation to the latter conception of empirical truth that Sellars develops, secondly, his Peircean long run view of truth, and here I just want to close with a few observations concerning these views from Sellars in relation to Bernstein’s chapter 5 with its criticism of long run views and its showcasing of Brandom’s formal-structural conception of objectivity.

I do not think that Bernstein’s particular objections to the long run regulative idea of objective empirical truth are persuasive (cf. 112-116), at least not in the case of Sellars’ view of self-correcting theory-succession in science (Bernstein focuses on Misak; on Sellars on conceptual change and convergence, cf. O’Shea 2007, chapter 6). For example, Sellars (in these respects like Thomas Kuhn) would agree with Bernstein that we cannot “specify now the norms that will govern future inquiry” (112); that it “is an illusion to think that there are ahistorical determinate standards to which we can appeal that will sharply distinguish once and for all what ‘really’ are good or better reasons” (114); and that the “history of science” shows “that standards of argumentation and justification have changed in ways that no scientist or philosopher might have anticipated” (114). However, it must be admitted that there are other worries about such long run views, including Sellars’, and it seems to me that there is a more general worry concerning truth and objectivity that motivates the development of such convergence views, but which pertains to human cognition and practices in general. This will bring us back, finally, to Bernstein’s “progressive narrative” in chapter 5.

4 Crispin Wright on ‘superassertibility’ is another important development of this conception, as are aspects and stages in the thought of Putnam, Habermas, and other thinkers discussed by Bernstein in chapter 5 under the heading of “Ideal Justification and Truth”.

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ISSN: 2036-4091 2011, III, 2
which culminates – not to suggest that Bernstein uncritically or wholly accepts this view – in Brandom’s conception of objectivity. According to the latter, as Bernstein puts it in his own words, “built into the very structure of social discursive practices is a distinction between what is ‘merely’ subjective and what is objective, what seems to be so and what really is so” (122).

Again, let us take the Sellarsian ‘space of reasons’ as one way of raising the problem of realism and objectivity in the face of the relativity to practices of meaning and justification, as discussed earlier. The final section of Brandom’s shorter book, *Articulating Reasons*, entitled “Objectivity”, nicely lays out the sort of “structural dilemma” here between the question of the correct assertibility of a given claim by those following the rules of a given practice, and the question of “getting things right” objectively “according to a standard set by the things about which one is speaking”, and asking: “Is the claim correct in the sense that things really are as it says they are?” (Brandom: 2000, 197-8). Brandom’s solution involves showing that the complex discursive interplay between our normative commitment and our entitlement to claims enables a systematic distinction in any propositionally contentful discourse between the truth conditions and the assertibility conditions of those claims: for example, “between the contents of ordinary empirical claims and the contents of any claims about who is committed or entitled to what” (ibid., 201).

But in this light let us finally return to the remarks on Sellars above concerning the systematic differences (as discussed in his *Science and Metaphysics*, chapter 5) between the ways in which moral truths, mathematical truths, and empirical truths are objective – setting aside all issues about the long run of science, and just considering any empirical framework or domain of cognition whatsoever (whether ‘manifest’ or ‘scientific’). Here, I think, lies a most difficult and unresolved source of the dilemma concerning realism and objectivity for those who have taken the pragmatic turn. Can a ‘space of reasons’ pragmatist, while rejecting implausible positivistic ‘fact vs. value’ distinctions, nonetheless defend a plausible and principled distinction between (1) the ways in which perceptual-empirical claims (i.e., Sellars’ “matter-of-factual”, world-representational claims), such as there is a coffee cup on this table, are objectively true by corresponding to the layout of things in the environment (to put it crudely), and (2) the ways in which moral, mathematical, aesthetic, political, and other claims can be objectively true according to the normative rules of a given practice? Brandom’s normative-structural conception of objectivity and of the representation of facts across both (1) and (2) affords us no grounds, as far as I can see, for any principled distinction of this kind.

I cannot argue this point further here, but I do not think that the issues pertaining to realism and objectivity will cease to be seen by philosophers at large as more of a problem for than a virtue of the pragmatist tradition until someone succeeds, as Sellars and some others have tried to do (independently of any stronger claims concerning the Peircean long run of science), in the task of embedding within pragmatism a rigorous and defensible distinction between the domain of matter-of-factual perceptual and (broadly) scientific truths about empirical objects in general on the one hand, and on the other hand all the other domains in which our claims to objective truth can be well-grounded but in different ways appropriate to those domains. I think there are grounds to believe that a global pragmatism can and should make this sort of principled realist distinction from the inside, as it were, without losing the insights that make it worth wholeheartedly embracing Bernstein’s *Pragmatic Turn*. 
References
James, W., (1907), Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking and The Meaning of Truth: A Sequel to ‘Pragmatism’.
Bernstein’s last book is one of the most eloquent reconstructions of old and new pragmatism. As always, Bernstein combines scholarship and accessibility, technical issues and open debates. This brilliant book is an introduction available to any amateur, but it will also offer to connoisseurs a new opportunity to rack their brains.

The prologue is both a declaration of principles and an extraordinary map, a balance of a personal journey and a guide for new routes. Chapters 1, 2, and 3 are dedicated to the three forefathers (Peirce, James and Dewey). Chapters 7, 8 and 9 to three contemporary voices: Putnam, Habermas, Rorty. Besides, the plot of the book continuously interweaves ideas of old and new thinkers, along with a variety of spheres of epistemological, ethical and political discussions. Central chapters, 4, 5 and 6, through their thematic titles, do contribute even more to the round trip and the multidimensional approach. Peirce’s legacy, for example, is interestingly connected with McDowell’s philosophy in chapter 2. James’s pluralism is connected with Horace Kallen and Alain Locke in chapter 3. In chapter 4 Hegel operates as a sort of immense wave that agitates the whole pragmatic sea from past to present, from Peirce and Dewey to Brandon and McDowell, passing through Sellars. Chapters 5 and 6, using some keywords (“truth”, “objectivity” and “experience”) also combines in a synoptic view old and new names and perspectives. Many other names incidentally appear: Misak, Stout, Wellmer, Honneth. Personally I would appreciate that some names would have appeared more frequently (Emerson and Santayana). There is no reference to Sydney Hook and Morton White, although I am sure they were very important milestones between old and new pragmatism. Hans Joas and Axel Honneth could have had a little bit more showing, particularly after writing a magisterial chapter on Habermas. The existentialist pragmatism of John McDermott and the prophet one of Cornell West are also absent. However, to suggest Richard Bernstein to introduce more voices would be like asking him to write a bigger but too heavy encyclopaedic book, or a historic novel full of characters but much less provocative and useful than this one.

One more time, he idiosyncratically arranges a chronicle of an intense polyphonic style, creating a choral book that could be seen as a new chapter of the “conflict of interpretations” which he himself diagnosed some years ago. He articulates with an inspirational

1 Susan Haack is also out of the plot. I ignore Bernstein’s opinion on her particular way of describing the evolution of pragmatism. I criticized her position in “Pragmatismo reformista, pragmatismo radical” (Respuesta a “Viejo y Nuevo pragmatismo” de Susan Haack), Diánoia, Vol. XLVIII, n° 50, mayo 2003, FCE-UNAM, México, 2003, pp. 145-180.

2 To understand the background of The Pragmatic Turn it is very useful to keep in mind earlier Bernstein’s chronicles about the history of pragmatism: “The Resurgence of American Pragmatism”, Social Research 59 (1992), pp. 813-840; “American Pragmatism: The Conflict of Narratives”, in H. J. Saatkamp, Jr (ed.), Rorty and Pragmatism, Nashville, Vanderbilt University Press, 1995; and especially “The New Pragmatists”, Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal 28 (2007), pp. 3-35. Bernstein had always given credibility to William James’s distinction between “tender-minded” and “tough-minded” philosophical characters, but he has also introduced a synchronic perspective into James’s typology. Old pragmatists, for example, seemed too tough in comparison with the Gentle tradition, but “by the late 1930s..., and increasingly among professional academic philosophers, pragmatism was viewed as excessively “tender-minded” —vague, diffuse, fuzzy, and soft at the center. A patronizing attitude
conversational style not only a retrospective view of the three major waves of pragmatism but also a singular prospective of the upcoming sea change in contemporary philosophy. And both views, backward and forward, are not exempt of conflict. Reading Bernstein’s book as an invitation to philosophical ecumenism would be like taking William James as a quiet soul or to think of John Dewey as a candid educator. Since the very idea of conversation is open to debate, since there are diverse and even antagonist interpretations about how a philosophical conversation should be practiced, the first thing that one should try to make clear is what idea of conversation Bernstein has exactly in mind. In the prologue to his book (p. 31) he says something very instructive:

[…] it is best to think of the discourse about pragmatism as an open-ended conversation with many loose ends and tangents. I don’t mean an “idealized” conversation or dialogue, so frequently described and praised by philosophers. Rather, it is a conversation more like the type that occurs at New York dinner parties where there are misunderstandings, speaking at cross-purposes, conflicts, and contradictions, with personalized voices stressing different points of view (and sometimes talking at the same time). It can seem chaotic, yet somehow the entire conversation is more vital an illuminating than any of the individual voices demanding to be heard. This is what the conversation of pragmatism has been like.

Of course, conversations in New York parties are different from conversations in other places in the USA. And conversations in Italy, Germany and Spain are quite different from conversations in any place from the USA. But independently of geographical considerations and local variations, the main point seems clear: the pragmatist conversation can produce happy encounters but never a happy end. Or in other words: the pragmatist conversation is open to agreements, shared opinion, and common ends-in-view, but it carries on without the consolatory ideal of a final agreement. The story of pragmatism is neither a grand narrative of the progress of the philosophical evolvement nor a quest for the last word on some philosophical topic or problem.

A conversation is not a research, yet it can actually improve knowledge. It can result into a better understanding of problems, although the sort of insight that it provides is not organized according to a “research program”. Since its very origins, the pragmatic philosophers did reach agreements and accepted compromises, but they also manifested open discrepancies at the same time. Contemporary pragmatism is not different: it is a tumultuous discussion, rather than a philosophical corporation. After reading Bernstein, one could think that truly pragmatic characters have more skill organizing good parties than putting together philosophical conventions.

When I say that the pragmatic movement is not like a “party” I do not mean that pragmatic minds could not be partisan in many circumstances. On the contrary, after reading Bernstein one can also think that a true and good conversation (at New York, and also in many other places) is not a quiet and peaceful dialogue. A real conversation does not exclude agón, engagement, conflict and radical differences. What it does actually exclude is toward pragmatism developed. The pragmatists may have had their hearts in the right place but not their heads. Their fuzziness and lack of rigor simply did not meet the high standards of precision and clarity required for ‘serious’ philosophic investigation”. “The New Pragmatists”, op. cit, p. 6. It would be interesting to speculate if some neopragmatists have developed a patronizing attitude toward sympathizers of pragmatism using it as a new pretext to consolidate an over-professionalized philosophical style. I analyzed Rorty’s scepticism about “dialogue” between techies and fuzzies in “¿Adiós a la filosofía?: Recuerdos de Rorty”, in La filosofía de Richard Rorty, Biblioteca Nueva, Madrid, 2010, pp. 197-224.
that sort of acquiescence than the word “dialogue” sometimes seems to inspire. For Bernstein, indeed, any conversation is ineluctably pluralistic, but in the most radical sense, that is, in William James’s sense of “pluralism”. As he also says:

If James was right (as I think he was), it is unrealistic and undesirable to think that we will ever escape from some form of the clash of intuitions and temperaments. This pluralistic clash energizes philosophical speculation and enlivens philosophical debate. Sometimes it is just the slings and arrows that we feel from those who oppose us that drive us to a more subtle articulation of a philosophical orientation. This is the way in which I think it is best to view the development of pragmatism from Peirce to Brandom and Habermas. And as any good pragmatist knows, nobody has the final word (124).4

But if the conversation is passionate and tense, it is also a school and a laboratory, a place where one learns to speak a language and where everybody will always have the need to find and elaborate better arguments. This point is important: for Bernstein a real conversation is an inquiry, taking “inquiry” in the sense that Dewey gave to the term, that is, inquiry as an educative and intellectual activity, inquiry as a social task and agency, and not as this sort of detached research that many post-analytic philosophers are still vindicating. In *The Pragmatic Turn* Bernstein converses fluidly with authors like Brandom, McDowell and Putnam, and his efforts to convoke different philosophical voices in the same conversation are laudable and desirable. Bernstein’s reconstruction is both sympathetic and critical: “Brandom – he says – opens up one of the most promising ways… and shows how one can develop a robust pragmatic understanding of justification, truth, inter-subjectivity and objectivity” (122-123). But, he also says: “I strongly disagree with Brandom’s assessment of the American Pragmatic tradition. He fails to recognize that Peirce’s pragmaticism is a normative pragmatism… we also find in Peirce an anticipation of Brandom’s inferential semantics, and his all-important distinction between what it is implicit in

3 If we read the footnote in which Bernstein quotes a passage by Kenneth Burkes that Elisabeth Goodstein revealed to him, we can appreciate much more some properties of the sort of conversation that Bernstein has in mind: As Burke said, we always come to parties when many others voices have long preceded us and are already engaged in a too heated discussion. There is no pause, nor would anybody explain to us exactly what it is about. In fact, nobody could retrace exactly for us all the steps that had gone before, since to some extent, any discussion has already begun before any of the participants where there. However, after listen for a while we will put in our ear and we will try to catch the tenor of the argument…. “Someone answers; you answer him; another comes to your defence; another aligns himself against you, to either the embarrassment or gratification of your opponent, depending upon the quality of your ally’s assistance. However, the discussion is interminable. The hours grows late, you must depart. And you do depart, with the discussion still vigorously in progress” (Burke, Kenneth. *The Philosophy of Literary Form*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1941, quoted in Bernstein, p. 221). As a model of philosophical investigation, one could say that this sort of conversation resembles some traits of Gadamer’s idea of dialogue. However, the way of conceiving the influence of the past in the present is different. Re-appropriations of hermeneutics motives, by the way, have been a characteristic mark of Bernstein’s style since the 80s. See my “Derivas pragmatistas”, introduction to Bernstein, *Filosofía y Democracia. John Dewey, Madrid, Herder, 2009.*

4 See what Bernstein says on “engaged pluralism” at p. 62. In some occasions Bernstein has also mentioned James’s description of philosophical conflict in “A World of Pure Experience” (1904): “It is difficult not to notice a curious unrest in the philosophic atmosphere of the time”…. The passage, by the way, follows: “…always loosening of old landmarks, a softening of oppositions, a mutual borrowing from one another reflecting on the part of systems anciently closed, and an interest in new suggestions, however vague, as if the one thing sure were the inadequacy of the extant school-solutions. The dissatisfaction with these seems due for the most part to a feeling that they are too abstract and academic. Life is confused and superabundant, and what the younger generation appears to crave is more of the temperament of life in its philosophy, even thought it were at some cost of logical rigor and of formal purity”. Saving some distances, I think that Bernstein subscribes a great deal of James’s diagnosis, except probably the last sentence. *Pragmatic Turn* is a vindication of a change in which philosophy losses its purity, but not its rigor.
and what it is explicit in social practices” (104). Peirce’s model of grades of control, Bernstein adds in other passage, could question Brandom’s distinction between a theory that gives priority to reasoning in understanding what is to say or to do something (a rationalist pragmatism) and an approach where the “emphasis is placed on the continuities between discursive and nondiscursive creatures” (note 12, 227). But then, we could go further: if Brandom would have taken much more seriously not only Peirce, but Dewey, he could see much more seriously challenged his rationalist pragmatism.

The problem, I would suggest, is not only a problem with the assessment of pragmatism. Maybe the matter is not how much attention Brandom had paid to the legacy of pragmatism, but rather that his entire philosophical model is radically oriented by a program research. If I don’t remember badly, James, Dewey, Rorty and Bernstein had talked extensively about logic, epistemology, politics, education, good and evil, life and death, body and soul. And probably such an open philosophical agenda has been the most permanent trait of the pragmatic conversation. Brandom, on the contrary, is oriented by a guiding theory of rationality whose social dimension, contrary to Rorty’s own predictions and sincere hopes, contributes neither to a radical transformation of the self-image of human beings, nor to the transformation of philosophy into a less professionalized activity.

The case of McDowell would require further commentaries, but it is also very interesting that Bernstein make use of Peirce’s philosophy to understand essential categories by McDowell. One would think that he is more comfortable with McDowell’s style and method that with Brandom’s, but a detailed discussion of this point exceeds the scope of this review. In the case of Putnam, things could sound very well, since Putnam opened gradually his theory to political and social issues since the 80s. Bernstein’s rewriting of Putnam’s philosophy is accurate and generous, rich and sensitive. But even if there have been good conversations between Rorty, Bernstein, Putnam and Habermas on ethics and democracy, I would tend to think that he is still mainly oriented by a robust idea of what a philosophical argument is. In consequences, I have some doubts if Putnam would put Bernstein’s own model of philosophical investigation at the same level that his own idea of a thick philosophical research, no matter if both of them could enjoy some parties.

Habermas and Rorty are the last two main voices in Bernstein’s choral narrative. And I think that this fact is very relevant. Habermas represents a European turn of Social Philosophy that, since the 60s, found in American pragmatism a motif of inspiration and of debate.

5 I don’t think that thanks to the work of Brandom readers become more reflective about the Hegelian dimension in a pragmatic tradition. European thinkers as K. O. Apel and J. Habermas since the 70’s, or more recently Axel Honneth and Hans Joas have contributed decisively to reconnect Hegel with pragmatism much more than Brandom. Interpreters of Dewey as R. Westbrook, J. Ryan, N. Cougahn, J. Good, and J. Shook have also provided new routes of study. Pitkin’s reading of Dewey in “Was Pragmatism the Successor to Idealism?” (Misak, Ch., The New Pragmatists, Oxford, 2007) however, it does not make the most of Dewey’s legacy and prefers to demonstrate that Brandom is not really a Hegelian but a Fichtean.


7 Bernstein’s comprehensive criticism of Putnam in Pragmatic Turn (pages 162, 164, 165, 166-67) could be used to justify these doubts. An important difference is that, in spite of all his criticism, Bernstein admits more or less Putnam’s approach to the entanglement of facts and values. I think he grants Putnam too much. It could be possible to challenge some of Putnam’s presuppositions from Deweyan premises. See on Faerna, A., “Moral Disagreements and the ‘Fact/value Entanglement’”, in Following Putnam’s Trail, M. Uxía Rivas, C. Cancela & C. Martínez, Rodopi, 2008.
Rorty, on his part, represents one of the most unclassifiable voices of the American philosophical scene since the same years, a voice that his friend Bernstein supported with loyalty and criticized exhaustively at one.

Chapter 8 on Habermas, I would say, is one of the most exhaustive and ambitious chapters of The Pragmatic Turn: it reconstructs the evolution of Habermas’s thought, at the same time that it rises questions about the consistence of what Bernstein called “Kantian Pragmatism”. Many of Bernstein’s criticisms of Habermas’s “dichotomies” in this chapter “are in the spirit of Hegel” (199), but Bernstein does not support his Hegelian critique of Habermas in arguments by German thinkers of a Hegelian air. Bernstein’s critique of Habermas, on the contrary, derives from an immanent critique of Habermas’s theory. It is clear that, since Bernstein’s spirit is both critical and edifying, he omits in his reconstruction of Habermas a good deal of his own ideas about “thin” democratic virtues with which he had criticized Habermas in other occasions.

A last chapter on Rorty remarkably ends Bernstein’s chronicle, but it would be a mistake to take Rorty as the last character of the chronicle. Rorty is rather the main counter-voice through Bernstein’s whole book, from the beginning to the end, in the rich prologue (13, 16, 19, 20-21), in many chapters, and specially in the one dedicated to the linguistic turn (126,133-4-5, 141, 144, 148), as well as in turning points of the chapter dedicated to Habermas (191). Rorty is not the last character, but probably the always close and distant voice of the book, a permanent but nowadays absent companion of a conversation. As I have said, Bernstein’s model of philosophical investigation is not an analogue to scientific research (or at least it is not analogue to the way in which some philosophers portrait scientific research). However, Bernstein’s model of philosopher is not the poetic one. Rorty once said: “I envy the poets, just analytic philosophers like Quine envy natural scientist. One of the differences between analytics and non-analytic philosophy had to do with the object of the philosopher’s envy. I cannot imagine being envious of a physicist or a mathematician, any more than of an accountant or a lawyer – no matter how talented or how socially useful. I am not sure that Quine could have imaging being envious of a Blake or a Rilke.”

Bernstein’s magisterial chapter on Rorty makes us understand much better why Bernstein’s own philosophical journey never was articulated on such a dichotomy between scientists and poets. The whole chapter is an amazing reconstruction of a friendship and of an opposition, but pages 213-216 should be considered with particular attention. Ending a book saying that “no other philosopher of the past half-century has stimulated as much lively conversation as Rorty”, is a proof that, Bernstein’s essays are probably another version of what Hannah Arendt considered “essays of understanding”. Bernstein’s reconstruction of Rorty’s

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8 Honneth does not appear in this chapter, probably the one where one should expect just to find it more properly.


10 “Persuasion is a Good Thing”, interview with Wolfgang Ullrich and Helut Mayer in Munich, 1998, chapter 7 of Take Care of Freedom. Interviews with Richard Rorty, edited and introduced by E. Medietta, Stanford, 71. In Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature, Rorty have said: “Edifying philosophers want to keep space open for the sense of wonder which poets can sometimes cause...” (370).
gaps, illusions and disillusions, insights and contradictions does not make of him a stronger poet able to redescribe his antagonist in his own terms, pace Bloom. It is rather an evidence of a type of understanding in which the interpreter tries to see things from the other’s perspective, at the same time that he perceives the limits of his own empathy.11

I’m not sure if – as Bernstein says – “Rorty lost his patience with careful arguments” after Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature (a book to which apparition, by the way, Bernstein contributes personally). Being true that in some books Rorty “sounded more like a speechwriter for a presidential candidate than a serious social reformer” (214) and that “redescription, no matter how imaginative, is not enough” (Ibidem), I think, however, that Rorty made careful arguments after his most famous book, and that his emphasis on redescriptions was in many occasions a reasonable campaign against an over-professionalized style of political thinking. Bernstein is right when he claims “that for a pragmatist who prides himself on paying attention to those practical differences that make a difference, Rorty doesn’t provide us with the foggiest idea of how to achieve (or even approximate) the goals and hopes that he cherishes” (Ibidem), but I would like to know if many other styles of political philosophy more systematic and architectonic provide us better receipts that make a real difference. Rorty’s dualism between argument versus redescriptions, explanation and invention, then, could be seen more as an instrument than as a description about two separate realms of human agency (in any case, a detail discussion on the differences between Bernstein and Rorty would require almost a whole book by its own right).12

I will finish this review with a confession: I have some doubts about the communication between different shores of philosophy, and about the coexistence between prose and poses of contemporary philosophers associated with the pragmatic turn. Bernstein’s own narrative is neither optimistic nor pessimistic. His chronicle reconstructs as no one else turning points in the history of pragmatism and it helps us to understand much better a heterogeneous tradition from the perspective of somebody who has judiciously evolved between two generations and travelled intellectually between several continents. His narrative makes us revaluate the consequences of a turn, but at the same time it implicitly insinuates that, after all, the pragmatic turn is still a task before us.13

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11 I guess that James’s works and character also inspired in Bernstein this model of knowledge.
13 This paper has been written with the support of the research program Public Sphere, Value Conflicts and Social Experience: A Pragmatist Perspective (Ministerio de Ciencia y de Innovación del Gobierno de España, FFI2008-03310/FISO). I’m grateful to Santiago Rey (NSFRS) for his comments and improvement of this text.
Sarin Marchetti

Richard J. Bernstein on Ethics and Philosophy between the Linguistic and the Pragmatic Turn

1. In his compelling article *American Pragmatism: The Conflict of Narratives*, Richard Bernstein quotes a perceptive line by Alasdair MacIntyre that goes

[A] tradition not only embodies the narrative of an argument, but is only recovered by an argumentative retelling of that narrative which will itself be in conflict with other argumentative retellings.\(^1\)

Bernstein, in the essay mentioned, works through MacIntyre’s passage in order to “engage in the “argumentative retelling” of a metanarrative –literally a narrative about the narratives that we tell ourselves about the history and development of the American pragmatic movement” (55). This task can be articulated in a subplot of ambitions. Bernstein in fact continues by saying that he wants to demonstrate

1. That what we call pragmatism is itself –to use a Kantian turn of phrase– constituted by the narratives that we tell about pragmatism.

2. That the history of pragmatism has always –from its “origins” right up to the present– been a conflict of narratives…[T]here are (as a pragmatist might expect) a plurality of conflicting narratives.

3. That there is not only a conflict of narratives, but a fortiori, a conflict of metanarratives. There are better or worse narratives and metanarratives. And we can give good reasons in support of our claims for what is better. (I take this to be a cardinal principle of any pragmatic narrative).

4. That when future philosophers tell the story of the development of philosophy in America from the late nineteenth century through the twentieth century, they will highlight its thematic continuity far more than is presently acknowledged. They will see a continuous series of explorations and controversies about persistent pragmatic themes.\(^2\)

These statements read as the blueprint of a pragmatist manifesto, and Bernstein’s latest book *The Pragmatic Turn*\(^3\) is indeed all about elaborating on these four points as to achieve his authoritative narrative and metanarrative of the pragmatic turn. However, a closer look at its contents reveals that beyond canvassing a very imaginative account of the pragmatist tradition in its varieties of turns, the book accomplish another collateral, but not less seminal, attainment: namely, an understanding of the companion linguistic turn made by analytic

\(^1\) MacIntyre (1977: 461).
\(^3\) Hereafter, PT. Whenever otherwise specified, all quotations refer to this work.
philosophy as informed by pragmatism itself. In what follows I shall comment two kindred features of this entanglement of turns by assessing some themes pervading the very dialectic of the book examined. They are, respectively, the understanding of the very nature of philosophical activity between the pragmatic and the linguistic turn, and its bearings for ethics. By advancing his own narrative and metanarrative of the emergence of pragmatism and its relation with some key moments of analytic philosophy, Bernstein depicts a captivating path of inquiry through which investigating such features. Whether the motif of the intertwining of themes and methods between the pragmatic and the linguistic turn in their characterization of the role and shape of philosophy is explicit in PT, the companion rethinking of the philosophical credentials of ethical thought is partly an explorative projection on the pages of the book that I will carve out from the folds of its argumentative telling.

2. Readers of Bernstein approaching PT will recollect a peculiar flavor which is clearly experienceable while reading Praxis and Action, an early book by the author dated back in 1971. What these two works share is a common argumentative dialectics, in which historical considerations about the shape and development of pragmatism and analytic philosophy—among others traditions—are intertwined with the author’s own positions and views on them. If in his other books Bernstein applies or uses pragmatism—since, as he says, they are “informed by a pragmatic sensibility” (29, my italics)—to cope either with specific problems or with non-pragmatist authors and movements, in both Praxis and PT Bernstein works from within the pragmatic tradition to carve out its theoretical intuitions, placing them at the same time in an enlarged genealogy which includes Kant and Hegel, Wittgenstein and his heirs. The live struggle appreciable in both works that interests me here in spelling out is Bernstein’s deep interrogation about the place and role of pragmatism at the crossroad of such a genealogy, whose close examination will reveal some deep interesting conversations between the linguistic and the pragmatic turn animating it. PT, however, is not merely on pragmatism and its accomplishments in these provinces of thought, but rather it is a pragmatist book itself, since the method Bernstein employs for such an interrogation is that of looking for “the difference that makes a difference” between the pragmatic and the linguistic register. Bernstein claims that the understanding of their shared framework and background will allow us to appreciate at more depth both their differences and distances.

It is in this context that Bernstein challenges us to revise our representation of the alleged gulf between pragmatism and analytic philosophy, and question our ways of talking about it. Bernstein is engaged in debunking a varieties of myths that took credit inside the “familiar story”, according to which analytic philosophy displaced pragmatism marginalizing and relegating it to “the dustbin of history” (12), contributing in a major way to its re-

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4 Bernstein points out that, beyond analytic philosophy, “[t]he phrase “the linguistic turn” has been used to characterize Habermas’s theory of communicative action and discourse theory of ethics, Heidegger’s late philosophy, Gadamer’s ontological hermeneutics, Derrida’s deconstruction, and Foucault’s discourse theory” (p. 126). Here I will concentrate exclusively on the linguistic turn made by analytic philosophy, both because in PT it occupies a place of prominence, and also because otherwise the already crawling stage of figures would be irremediably overcrowded.

5 Bernstein’s attainments are even wider, since during his intellectual biography he did not only waved together a number of impressive themes and questions from both the pragmatic and the analytic traditions in order to show their entanglement, but also from the so-called continental philosophy and its profusion of voices—with also some insightful incursions into Marxism and psychoanalysis. In all these fields he contributed in a major way to establish a new canon of studies.

6 See Bernstein1992 and 2006 for a presentation and an assessment of such a privileged narrative.
writing. The two main argumentative retelling of the mythical view could be labeled as the “incompatibility recount” and the “improving recount” respectively. While according to the first recount analytic philosophy replaced pragmatism due to its improper fixation on experience as together the proper stage and the main object of philosophical discussion, according to the second recount analytic philosophy denounced the pragmatists for their immaturity in the understanding of the proper method of philosophical analysis, misspending in this way the valuable insights they had about the principle animating it. In Praxis Bernstein questions this second major strand of the myth according to which there would not be a neat divide between pragmatism and analytic philosophy, but rather an advancement of views through an improvement of method (Bernstein 1971: 168). Bernstein’s 1971 diagnosis of the die-hardness of this version of the myth is still valid now in 2011, and thus a strategy for its displacement yet urgent. In fact, this “improving recount” is based on the flawed assumption “still thought by many philosophers” that what the pragmatists sketched was a doctrine whose epistemological and verificationist soul kept the imagination of logical empiricists, who framed it in what they thought was the proper theoretical apparatus that could enhance the good insights expressed in it. We can challenge the improving recount as a misunderstanding by showing how pragmatism never defended any “verificationist doctrine” of the type vindicated by logical empiricists. As Bernstein shows us⁷, pragmatism was in fact very critical of the central assumptions of logical empiricism, and, moreover, the sea changes internal to the analytic registers can be read as a progressive re-discovery of the main themes and intuitions of the pragmatic turn, which, however, far from being pictured as a doctrine whose main contribution was the defense of a verificationist criterion of meaning, is now praised as a method for doing philosophy. We cannot make sense of the bearings of pragmatism on analytic philosophy if we fail to appreciate the developments internal to the latter movement, whose shape was that of a “revolutionary change in the very paradigm of description and explanation” in which “new ways of observing, describing, and explaining arose”⁸. There was in fact a “spirit of reductionism” haunting the hey-days of early analytic philosophy that had been displaced by a more attentive and resourceful understanding of the linguistic turn. Pragmatism, that constituted the main philosophical event that preceded the linguistic turn, criticized a number of dichotomies that were central to the early analytic philosophers, as the science/philosophy or the analytic/synthetic dichotomies, opening the way for a much more informed understanding of the potentials of the linguistic turn itself.

These criticisms are of the utmost importance to the refusal of the first strand of the mythical view – what we have called “the incompatibility recount” – which is addressed and dismissed in chapter 6 of PT on Experience after the Linguistic Turn. In this key chapter of the book Bernstein explicitly tackles the intertwinment of the pragmatic and the linguistic registers on the central feature of philosophy’s relationship with experience and language, showing how the two share some seminal views about the stance philosophers should take on these concepts (126-9). This time the attack on pragmatism was partly joined by a friendly fire. In fact it came from the pragmatic province of Rorty’s reconstruction of the

⁷ In Praxis Bernstein dedicates a section to A Metaphilosophical Interlude (250-60) in which he tackles the main passages of the linguistic turn in analytic philosophy in order to show its complex internal articulation. In a later section (298-303) the author says that there is an important lesson for analytic philosophy to be learned from the pragmatists, a lesson about “their emphasis on inquiry as a self-corrective practice, their insistence on fallibilism, and their suspicion of ontological, epistemological, and even linguistic dichotomies” (298). If properly understood, this lesson has as one of its major outcomes the delegitimization of the appropriation of pragmatism by logical empiricism and of their companion use of the turn.

linguistic turn as the philosophical passage from the concern for the concept of experience to that of language. Bernstein is critical of the way Rorty recommends the abandonment of the notion of experience altogether from the pragmatist agenda, with his companion invocation of a new stage of linguistic pragmatism which would take the best from the linguistic (the idea of changes of vocabularies) and the pragmatic turn (its anti-representationalism). Bernstein contends that we should rethink the linguistic and the pragmatic turn as each supporting the other in its peculiar difficulties, without postulating divides or alternations. In fact, an attentive look to what the authors in both traditions are trying to do—for example, with the concepts of experience and language (ch. 6 PT) or with those of truth and objectivity (ch. 5 PT)—will reveal the temptations and the shortcomings that could haunt both registers. Bernstein shows us both how “an enriched pragmatism can integrate the linguistic turn” (129), and how “philosophers, starting from the most diverse orientations and without being directly influenced by the classical pragmatists, have been articulating insights and developing theses that are not only congenial with a pragmatic orientation but also refine its philosophical import” (15). The kind of conversation, which at moments turns out to be a whirl of refinements, between pragmatism and analytic philosophy is thus to be portrayed not as a progressive adjustment of “doctrines” imposed from the outside, but rather as a mutual virtuous emulation of intents about the way philosophical reflection itself should be understood and practiced.

Notwithstanding a discrete but incessant work that has between done in dismantling the “familiar story” of the analytic-pragmatic divide, still the official records of the debate are vitiated by certain unimaginative reconstructions and evaluations of their intertwinement. However, the more Bernstein in his works had challenged these two recounts of the official narrative of their alleged divide, the more a subtler metanarrative of their conversations has gained authority. In PT the author works through the lines of the alleged divide of pragmatism and analytic philosophy, his strategy being that of showing by means of textual and contextual evidences how the two kept a conversation going between the respective barricades. Bernstein writes

The standard philosophical conventions that divide philosophy into such “schools” as pragmatism, analytic philosophy and Continental philosophy obscures [their] common pragmatic themes. Once these ideological blinders are removed, the philosophical investigations of the classical pragmatists, Heidegger, and Wittgenstein take on a fresh and more exciting character. If we bracket the standard and misleading philosophical classification and look at what these philosophers are actually saying and doing, then a very different panorama emerges. We discover commonalities in what pragmatists, Wittgenstein and Heidegger are all reacting against, in their critique of traditional epistemology and metaphysics, and especially in the sea change in philosophical orientation that they seek to bring out.

9 For his classical reconstruction of the shape of the linguistic turn, see Rorty 1967. It is noteworthy to notice how Rorty, even after the deep conversation he established with pragmatism and pragmatists, keeps tracing a categorical divide between experience and language (see Rorty 1992), the sort of divide Bernstein is suggesting us to get rid of. For a compelling discussion of Rorty on this passage, see Koopman 2007.

10 Bernstein 2010: 22. This statement echoes Rorty’s programmatic statement according to which “What I am trying to show is that the closer one brings pragmatism to the writings of Wittgenstein and those influenced by him, the more they shed light on each other” (Rorty 1961: 198-9). It is noteworthy to notice how in this early paper, by arguing about the Peirce-Wittgenstein entanglement of views, Rorty tries to bridge the gap between the linguistic and the pragmatic turn on the very topic of language, that is going to become a factor of differentiation between the two registers in those later writings where Rorty will mark a divide between classical and linguistic
Bernstein’s metanarrative proceeds in the narrow steep path running between the incompatibility and the improving recount. This subtler argumentative retelling aims at removing the unquestioned assumptions animating the received view of the analytic-pragmatic divide, accomplishing in this way the precious task of highlighting common paths of inquiry. One major consequence of Bernstein’s examination of the entanglement of the linguistic and the pragmatic turn consists in the exhibition of their internal complexities: far from being regarded as monolithic events, these movements should be read themselves as constituted by a variety of turns. It makes sense to speak about an intertwinement between the pragmatic and the analytic turn because there is an internal connection that interests their respective developments and characterized their dialogues.

3. Among the many paths through which Bernstein has explored these conversations, one of the most interesting is the one about the nature of philosophical reflection itself. Bernstein suggests us to picture both the pragmatic and the linguistic turn as revolutions in the way philosophers understood their own intellectual activity. What in fact characterizes them is their common aim of renovating the philosophical landscape in which they rose. Their nature is innovatory, revolutionary, critique. However, not always such turns have been understood this way by their own advocates. In the final pages of Praxis Bernstein mounted a critic to some early stages of the linguistic turn, and in particular to the way in which logical empiricists portrayed the role and shape of philosophical activity. He showed how they were held captive by the very same foundationalist temptations that they were resisting in idealism and British empiricism, temptations that pragmatism pictured as unwelcome assumptions of the way we represent ourselves philosophical reflection to be like. In PT the theme of how pragmatism informed the linguistic turn heads in the discussion of the central problems of objectivity, the nature of experience, and the facts/values entanglement, where Bernstein encourages us to rethink the very issue of the way we look at those issues after the pragmatic refinement of the linguistic turn. The critiques that Bernstein addresses to the way logical empiricists understood these questionings, and the companion praise for pragmatists’ way of handling them, aims at showing how a better –that is, from a pragmatic point of view, a more attentive– understanding of the potentialities of the linguistic turn can benefit from the teaching of the classical pragmatists. Thus, surprisingly enough, it could be said that a more perceptive version of the “improving recount” informs the relationship between the two turns: in fact the passage from the understanding of the linguistic turn by logical empiricists to the one by ordinary language philosophers (and, more specifically, by Wittgenstein and his heirs\textsuperscript{11}) is marked according to Bernstein by a pragmatic vein that might be described as progress.

According to the author, both pragmatists and analytic philosophers after Wittgenstein share an aversion toward a certain frame of mind, which in another compelling work he has

\textsuperscript{11} Bernstein states that “every major post-Wittgensteinian philosopher who has identified with the pragmatic tradition has been attracted to and influenced by the later Wittgenstein. All of them read Wittgenstein as sharing a great deal of pragmatism and as advancing the sophistication of pragmatic themes after the linguistic turn” (21). Bernstein, however, speaking of those analytic philosophers who made the linguistic turn (many of which were, as noticed, influenced by Wittgenstein) adds that “the more carefully one examines what [they] mean by language and the linguistic turn, the more difficult is to speak even about family resemblance” (126).
characterized as “a Cartesian Anxiety”\(^\text{12}\). Both movements aimed at a rethinking of the role and shape of philosophy, rescuing it from the shoals of foundationalism with its metaphysical, religious, epistemological and moral shortcomings\(^\text{13}\), and make it suitable again for “the critical role [of] guiding our conduct, enriching our everyday experience, and furthering creative democracy” \(\text{x}\). In rethinking the role and shape of philosophical reflection, Bernstein argues, these movements prompt us to challenge the expectations we have from it, since such an anxiety, before being philosophical, is a personal anxiety about what we want philosophy to be like. In the wake of the best teachings of James and Wittgenstein, Bernstein argues that, more often than we are ready to admit or even recognize, philosophical anxieties are driven by (or, indeed, are nothing but) personal attitudes, visions and cravings that we are inclined to petrify into philosophical stances. More than once in PT Bernstein recalls James’ insight that “the history of philosophy is to a great extent that of a certain clash of human temperaments”\(^\text{14}\), and Wittgenstein’s sharp observation that we ought to recognize how in certain philosophical discussions “a picture held us captive”\(^\text{15}\).

Both thinkers understood philosophy as a cure for intellectual and personal temptations to transcend our human condition, which we must silence by means of conceptual clarification. This can take a variety of forms, as for example the rescue of our ways of portraying and talking about our concepts and their meaning from intellectualistic constrains by showing their “use” or “cash value” in our discourses and practices. According to this therapeutic-cum-pragmatic conception of philosophical reflection, by investigating the ways in which we conceptualize, describe and problematicize our experiences and practices, we can arrive at a better understanding of them and even revise our very grasp of the philosophical techniques that we employ to address their difficulties.

Bernstein exhort us to think about the pragmatic and the linguistic turn in philosophy as methods for challenging our ways of thinking, and thus a method for doing philosophy. When in fact read as the advancement of philosophical theories, both turns fall into the foundational pitfalls against which they waive their criticisms. Bernstein takes the major contribution of both the pragmatic and the linguistic turn as that of debunking mythical pictures such as that of “the Given” or of “Truth with the capital T” by means of an attentive description of their sources of temptations. According to this characterization, philosophy is an activity whose aim is that of exhorting us to challenge received thoughts and untested philosophical assumptions, as well as to rethink the relationship we have with our own truths and principles. The pragmatic and the linguistic turn that pragmatism and analytic philosophy respectively made can be fruitfully described as reactions to frames of mind that relegated philosophical thought into an ivory tower of systems of knowledge and presuppositions, severing in this way philosophy from the ordinary. James’ invocation of “the lower, the nitty-gritty” that articulate our visions\(^\text{16}\) and Wittgenstein’s recounting of the ordinary and our human practices as the “bedrock” against which “[our] spade is turned”\(^\text{17}\) calls for a contiguity between philosophical reflection and the ordinary life it should account that is easily forget by those who portrays philosophy as the advancement of theories\(^\text{18}\). Bernstein notices in both turns a movement that could be described as a passage from

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\(^{12}\) Bernstein 1985: 16.

\(^{13}\) See Bernstein 1985: 19.

\(^{14}\) James 1907: 11.

\(^{15}\) Wittgenstein 1935: § 115.

\(^{16}\) See James 1907: 11; James 1907: 31-2.

\(^{17}\) Wittgenstein 1953: § 217. See also Wittgenstein 1953: §109; Wittgenstein 1937: § 86.3.

\(^{18}\) See James 1897b: 204; James 1879a: 75-6.
the explanation by means of reduction to the description by means of distinction and clarification. Philosophy should aim at the clarification of our ways of making sense of things and their difficulties, resisting the temptation of regulating such understandings from the above of their exercise. Philosophical explanations should leave the way to the description of our practices of knowledge, judgment and action, so that they can speak with their own distinctive voice without being suffocated into theories having no respect for their individual character.

4. This way of characterizing the methods of philosophical activity has immediate bearings for ethics, and in PT Bernstein gives us some advices about how to conceive moral thought after the linguistic and the pragmatic turn. Bernstein’s ethical incursions in PT are not systematic, but rather they pervade the text and are mostly appreciable in his examination of James’ pluralism in ch. 2, in the discussion of Putnam’s views about the fact/value entanglement in ch. 7, and also in the critique of Habermas’ (more-Kantian-than-pragmatist) categorical distinction between ethics and morality in ch. 8. Here I would like to briefly explore them in a direction made hospitable by the conception of philosophy presented in the previous section.

If philosophy has to be understood as a method for assessing our ways of thinking by means of the description of the practices in which they are embedded, than moral reflection should be thought as the clarification of the moral facts as they are experienced in our ordinary practices. This alternative understanding of ethics is critical of those projects picturing moral thought as the advancement of moral theories. In discussing the ethical dimension of James’ pluralism, Bernstein aims at silencing these alternative projects by showing their inadequacy in accounting for the character of our moral experiencing and addressing its difficulties. Bernstein reads James as one author who avoided the two extremes of “ultimate fixed foundations and foundationless relativism” by developing a conception of pluralism that makes justice to the way in which we arrive at experiencing the world. Such a conception expresses our very stance toward experience when we take it at face value without trying to force it under a general and thus misleading label. Bernstein writes

James was fully aware that the type of pluralism that he professed was offensive to many philosophers. He speaks about a deep philosophical impulse that wants something more orderly, more clear-cut, and more systematic. In this respect, James would have found a great ally in the later Wittgenstein, who also sought to cure philosophers of the craving for definitive order...Pluralism, in contrast to dogmatic monism, does not deny unity, but directs us to ask what kind of unity we are talking about –to look and see just how much unity we really discover and what kind of unity we mean.

Bernstein notices how James’ characterization of pluralism is immediately pertinent for the way he conceives moral thought, since it invites us to look and see those very experiencing that articulate our moral life from the inside of its very exercise. In his moral writings James argues against those who are driven by the deep philosophical impulse to avoid ambiguity and seek clear-cut distinctions in morality taking refuge in moral principles regu-

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19 Russell Goodman also made this point in his compelling study on Wittgenstein and James where he writes that “[t]here is a parallel movement of thought, or of method, pervading James’s Principles and Wittgenstein’s Investigations: a movement from the explanatory to the descriptive...[W]ittgenstein found not only fundamental errors in James but examples of how to proceed in philosophy [my italics], despite the fact that the two writers stand in distinct traditions of philosophy (Goodman 2002: 85-8).

20 Bernstein 2010: 59.
lating one’s conduct. Bernstein comments James’ pragmatic conception of moral philosophy by saying that it “calls for a critical engagement with other points of view and other visions...” Contrary to the picture of relativism that speaks of incommensurable frameworks and paradigms, James’s pluralism demands that we reach out to the point of contact where we can critically engage with each other” (62, my italics). Moral reflection should consist in a descriptive exercise, in which we challenge those frames of mind that impede us to have a genuine grasp on the moral life, such as the craving for philosophical theories about the good or the right with their unimaginative way of portraying moral disagreement.

Another illustration of the philosophical movement from explanation to description in ethics is the refutation of the artificial dichotomies that have been sometimes erected to fundamental principles of ethical theory, such as the one between facts and values. Bernstein works with Putnam in presenting the lesson of method which pragmatism has to teach us interested in thinking about the questions surrounding the alleged dichotomy. The way in which Bernstein exhorts us to rethink the fact/value dichotomy is that of looking at the varieties of contexts in which we feel compelled to claim it, and notice how each time we variously make reference to different kinds of values and different kinds of facts. We should be “philosophically sensitive” as to distinguish cognitive, ethical, political, and even procedural values, as well as to distinguish cognitive, ethical, political and even procedural facts. This recognition should warn us that the alleged dichotomy, far from a monolithic conception about the very constituents of the world, is better to be understood as the expression of the varieties of encounters we can have with the world. According to Bernstein, by describing such encounters together with the responses and the accounts we are prone to give, it will emerge how the dichotomy itself is functional to serve specific philosophical or personal purposes. Such a conception, far from dismissing it, invites us to re-describe the dichotomy in a way that resists its petrification into a crystallized divide. Bernstein observes that while “making distinctions (even if changing and open-ended) is important for specific philosophical purposes, [it] can be disastrous when functional distinctions are reified into rigid dichotomies (as the logical positivists reified the analytic-synthetic distinction)” (155). The task of philosophy is that of depicting the variety of forms that the dichotomy can take and of uses we make of it in order to assess their validity and shortcomings, resisting the temptation of mistaking our use of such a dichotomy with its necessity. Philosophical activity conducted in the mood of the pragmatic-cum-linguistic turn aims at clarifying all these different uses, suggesting the difficulties that we encounter when we try to reduce them to a unique model of explanation. This has major outcomes in moral philosophy since it undermines all those accounts of the moral life that are vitiated by foundational anxieties about the shape it should have and the principles that should animate it.

A final incursion into moral philosophy is made by Bernstein in his chapter of criticism on Habermas’ Kantian pragmatism. Despite his resourceful interpretation of both the linguistic and the pragmatic turn, Habermas is criticized by Bernstein for his Kantian heritage regarding the sharp distinction between theoretical and practical philosophy according to which “the task of theoretical philosophy is to provide an adequate account of truth, and the task of practical philosophy, an adequate account of normative rightness and, especially, moral norms” (180). It is in the discussion of this divide that Bernstein sketches an alternative way of conceiving the task of moral and practical philosophy. Following Kant Habermas traces an internal divide inside practical philosophy between ethics and morality, the first having to do with one’s particular (personal or group) orientation while the second with those norms applying to everyone as a human being. Bernstein argues that this is the kind of divide that pragmatists question, since if we look at the practices animating our or-
dinary lives, we do not find any clear-cut divide of the sort Habermas, after Kant, is arguing for. Such a distinction should be thought itself as the result of our ways of responding to such situations, since even what we call universalistic principles have shifting contours. Bernstein writes

Habermas is right to point out that there are more particularistic moral views and more universal validity claims in every living ethical orientation, but it is misleading to speak of “ethical world-view” as particularistic and “the moral point of view” as universalistic, and to contrast “a universalistic morality of justice” with “a particularistic ethics of the good life”. Here one would like Habermas to be more pragmatic and recognize that our values and norms forms a dynamic shifting continuum...Furthermore, we need to recognize just how open-ended “universalistic” moral claims are. It is not just that there are learning processes about what count as universal moral norms – a point Habermas emphasizes. But in the course of history, unanticipated consequences and structural transformations require radical rethinking of the very meaning of morality, responsibility, and justice.

What is notable in this quotation is Bernstein’s idea of the rethinking the very meaning of what morality altogether should look like. Once acknowledged that our moral distinctions and evaluations are a function of the place they occupy in our ordinary practices of morality, moral reflection should abandon the pretence to draw categorical distinctions and look at the ways in which we understand and speak about the varieties of considerations that are at stake in our ordinary moral experiencing. Bernstein asks us to look for the difference that makes a difference in order to assess the very nature of a moral norm or of an ethical value. Following Dewey, he asks “When we have to decide “moral”, “ethical”, or “merely pragmatic” issues, do we really engage in different types of practical deliberations?” (197), and answers that such questionings exhorts us to revise our way of understanding and living with such concepts.

5. These considerations about the very nature of ethics are the best evidence of the philosophical method we have sketched in the previous section, since they form an impressive battery of critiques to the way of thinking moral thought as the advancement of philosophical requirements and theories on the moral life. What Bernstein – following James, Wittgenstein, Putnam, and (the pragmatist side of) Habermas – is calling for is a more resourceful method for understanding the point and shape of what morality should look like. Talking about the losses and drawbacks of subscribing a certain philosophical position, Bernstein, in a mood recalling the first chapter of James’s pragmatism, beware of “the shrinkage of what we consider to be a legitimate topic of philosophical investigation” (141). We can adapt this insightful advice in the discourse about the method that an adequate treatment of moral reflection should take. From the scanty examples we have extracted from the dialectic of PT it emerges a very interesting picture of moral thought as an exhortative activity in which we are called for the development of an ethical sensibility in order to contrast the shrinkage of moral experiences affecting ethics when it is conceived as the advancement of moral theories. In ethics, as in philosophy altogether, we should abandon any foundationalist pretense by challenging our own expectations about how its shape

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22 It is noteworthy to notice that the author here refers precisely to those “analytically trained philosophers” who uncritically took the pragmatic turn as to narrow the field of questionings worth debating, neglecting in this way entire spheres of experience like that of religious experience – and, we add, jeopardizing the possibility of a proper treatment of ethical experiences, too.
should be like. According to the reading we’ve sketched, in PT Bernstein showed us some paths along which to proceed in dismantling foundationalist projects in ethics as well as in philosophy after the pragmatic and the linguist turn.

References


Richard Bernstein

Continuing the Conversation

I have consistently argued that the pragmatic tradition is enriched by the contribution of a plurality of voices. So I want to thank the contributors to this symposium for engaging with my work. I would like to begin my response with two general remarks. Although I have always identified myself with the pragmatic tradition, I have felt uneasy with the label “pragmatism”. And the reason is straightforward. As soon as we speak of any “ism” we are tempted explicitly (or implicitly) to specify the core conceptions or key theses that distinguish one “ism” from another. And too frequently we can end up with clichés at a high level of abstraction or with myths that smooth over complexities. This is especially true when we use the term “pragmatism” to designate the entire corpus of thinkers like Peirce, James, and Dewey (or others included in the pantheon of “classical” pragmatism). Peirce thought his categories of Firstness, Secondness and Thirdness as well as his semiotics were absolutely central to his pragmatism (pragmaticism). But I don’t think James – despite his generous acknowledgment of Peirce as the founder of pragmatism – had any deep understanding of what Peirce was up to and why he placed so much emphasis on logic. At times, Peirce hoped that philosophy would become a “rigorous science”. This is the last thing in the world that James desired or thought possible. Pluralism stands at the heart of James thinking but Peirce rarely speaks about pluralism. James and Dewey hoped to change the direction of philosophical inquiry so that it would focus on the vitally important topics of human beings. For Peirce the most vitally important topic is logic – and he thought that Dewey did not understand the first thing about logic. From his earliest days Dewey was deeply concerned with the social, political and educational problems of his time, as well as the promise and threats to democracy. One can read pages and pages of Peirce without having the slightest clue that he was directly concerned with these topics. One can easily continue noting “irreconcilable differences” among those that we take to be the founders of pragmatism. So I simply do not believe that there is a hard conceptual core of pragmatism. I am skeptical about “the identity of its conceptual boundaries” because these are constantly being challenged, transgressed, and renegotiated – and this has been true from the very beginning of American pragmatism. This raises a larger issue: Who is included and excluded from the American pragmatic tradition. Does it include Jane Addams, Josiah Royce, George H. Mead, Horace Kallen and Alain Locke? Various commentators have developed strong arguments for including each of these thinkers (and others) in the pragmatic canon. (This is why I use scare quotes when I speak of “classical” pragmatists). Does it make sense to speak, as Robert Brandom does, of Hegelian, Heideggerian, Wittgensteinian, and American pragmatism? It is plausible if one takes seriously Brandom’s thesis that pragmatism’s “core” thesis is the primacy of social discursive practices that generate norms. Yet some thinkers who identify themselves with the pragmatic tradition have been outraged by Brandom’s dismissal of the concept of experience. So rather than listing a set of theses that constitute the conceptual core of pragmatism or drawing up a list of those figures who are to be included or excluded in the canon, I have argued that we should do what Wittgenstein suggests – that we “look and see” in order to focus on themes that are philosophically promi-
nent and are loosely woven together in the thinkers that we tend to group in the pragmatic tradition. And we should be honest about the conflicts and blatant contradictions that we discover among those that we take to be the founders of pragmatism. This is what I have attempted to do. At various stages in my career I have listed some of these central themes—themes that are worked out in very different ways by different pragmatic thinkers. For example in my 1988 APA presidential address, I listed five themes: anti-foundationalism; fallibilism; the nurturing of critical communities of inquirers; sensitivity to the radical contingency and chance that mark the universe including our everyday lives; and irreducible plurality of perspectives and orientations. Today if I were drawing up such a list I might emphasize different themes. And given my pluralistic outlook, I recognize that others have (and will) emphasize still different themes in this tradition. I welcome this diversity as long as one is prepared to defend one’s “take” on pragmatism with good reasons (Of course, “good reasons” themselves can always be contested).

The “pull” of professional philosophy is still towards epistemological, semantic, and conceptual issues that have preoccupied academic philosophers. James and Dewey were apprehensive about such a development. There is a danger that philosophy (including pragmatism) may become more and more irrelevant to what Dewey called the “problems of men”—the cultural, ethical, economic, and political problems of everyday life. My hope is that a younger generation will renew this important critical dimension of the pragmatic tradition. Remember that Dewey always thought that philosophy’s primary task is to engage in imaginative criticism. In The Pragmatic Turn I wanted to show that if we focus on themes rather than labels the entire philosophic landscape takes on a different appearance. Labels like “pragmatism,” “analytic philosophy”, “the linguistic turn”, “continental philosophy” are not illuminating; they obscure the prominence of shared thematic concerns.

This brings me to my second general comment. Most of these papers touch on the discussion of the pragmatic turn and the linguistic turn—and the relation of “pragmatism” to “analytic philosophy”. I am fully aware of battles and wounds that are in the background of these discussions. I began my work on Dewey in the 1950s at a time when Dewey and the pragmatists were considered completely passé. Many of those dedicated to keeping alive the “classical” tradition of the pragmatic thinkers were marginalized in the profession. They were not invited to give papers at our professional meetings, they were excluded from the most prestigious jobs in universities, and they did not receive grants from prominent foundations. And to this day there are those who think of themselves as pragmatists who are suspicious about anything that smacks of “analytic” or “linguistic” philosophy, just as there are those who think that their favored version of “analytic philosophy” is the only game in town. What is perhaps even more disturbing is that these battles have broken out among those who identify themselves with the pragmatic tradition. We now have Peircians, Deweyeans, and Jamesians fighting among themselves. It makes eminent good sense that someone will be more attracted to, and inspired by, his favored pragmatic thinker. But we tend to forget that, despite the strong differences among Peirce, James, and Dewey; they were in philosophic conversation with each other—and learned from each other. For some defenders of the “classical” tradition the villain is Richard Rorty. Critiques of Rorty’s understanding of pragmatism have become a culture industry. For others there is deep suspicion about his student Robert Brandom—who looks like a hard core analytic philosopher dressed up in flimsy pragmatic garments. Sometimes this opposition is sloganized as “experience vs. language”. Sarin Marchetti rightly speaks of my “debunking” of the “improving” and the “incompatibility” accounts of pragmatism and analytic (linguistic) philosophy. I have always made a sharp distinction between what I call “analytic ideology” and what
philosophers who are classified as analytic philosophers actually do. I have no patience with the ideological arrogance of those who think that analytic philosophy is the only game in town or who think that anyone who has not made the “linguistic turn” is simply not really to be taken seriously as a philosopher. And I am also critical of those who think of the texts of the early pragmatic thinkers are the holy writ to be preserved, guarded and embalmed. I think that the so-called “linguistic turn” is a myth – a deeply misleading myth that needs to be debunked because when we “look and see” we discover the most diverse and frequently incompatible understandings of language and what the “linguistic turn” even means. In my chapter “Experience after the Linguistic Turn” I sought to show this. If we look at the work of Quine, Goodman, Davidson Rorty, Brandom, McDowell (and many others) we can detect refinements of themes that are prominent in Peirce, James, Dewey, and Mead (Of course there are striking differences too!). The point is to do justice to both common themes and differences. I also emphatically believe that there is a richness and diversity of the “classical” pragmatic thinkers that is still not fully appreciated or developed. We have lost something of the bold speculative spirit characteristic of the early American pragmatic thinkers.

Let me turn to some specific points raised by my interlocutors, I am grateful to Ramón del Castillo and Sarin Marchetti for setting the context for The Pragmatic Turn in the larger context of my work by it relating to Praxis and Action as well as several of my essays. Castillo nicely captures the sense of the slightly “tumultuous” polyphonic playful (but serious) conversation that I take to be a feature that has been (and continues to be) vital for keeping the pragmatic tradition alive. I still endorse McIntyre’s characterization of a tradition as embodying the narrative of an argument, which is in conflict with other argumentative retellings. Marchetti is sensitive to the ethical reflections that pervade the essays in The Pragmatic Turn and has been a prominent concern in all my philosophic writing. I would simply like to add two points. I frequently speak of “the ethical-political” because, like Aristotle and Dewey, I think they are inseparable. I agree with what Marchetti means when he says that “moral reflection should be a descriptive exercise, in which we challenge those frames of mind that impede us to have a genuine grasp of moral life”. But this can be properly done only if one has a larger vision of the ideals that we seek to achieve in our moral, ethical, and political lives. Although I have expressed my reservations about Habermas’s Kantian pragmatism, I have always thought that he plays a role in Europe – especially Germany – that is comparable to the role that Dewey played in the United States during the early decades of the twentieth century. Drawing on his philosophic concerns – significantly influenced by the American pragmatic thinkers – he has been a public intellectual addressing the issues of his times in the best Deweyean tradition. So although I agree with Marchetti that philosophic reflection should clarify our moral practices, it is not sufficient to be “descriptive” and “therapeutic”. Or rather these tasks demand the development of a critical vision. This is why I have always been drawn to the emancipatory features of Frankfurt critical theory.

I find that I am close in spirit to many of the positive points that James R. O’Shea makes. I think that he slightly misinterprets my remarks about “correspondence”. My intent was to show that there are features of our ordinary ways of talking that seem to invite some version of a philosophic correspondence theory of truth. I never wanted to deny the inference is involved in perceptual knowledge. This is precisely what I take to be one of the great virtues of Peirce’s analysis of perception. And I agree that if challenged about any knowledge claim (including perceptual knowledge), we are required “to give reasons if the question arises”. Of course, we need more than Secondness to do justice to “realistic intui-
tions”; we also need Thirdness. Or to use the Sellarsian terminology we need to carefully
distinguish the impact of causation from the justification of epistemic claims. I think that
O’Shea and I disagree about Sellars’ “scientific realism”. I have never been convinced by
the way in which Sellars stages the clash of the scientific and manifest images. And I find
Sellars’ theory of “picturing” extremely problematic. I am skeptical about Sellars’ “unified
notion of truth as correct semantic assertability” for reasons that have been developed by
McDowell and Brandom. And I also think that the way Sellars speaks of “different domains
of truth” is open to criticism. Here I simply want to register my reservations. Developing
and justifying them would require a much more extensive discussion. What I welcome in
O’Shea’s discussion (and in his book on Sellars) is the way in which he clearly places Se-
lars in the pragmatic tradition.

Let me conclude by commenting on a remark by Roberto Frega. He quotes my sentence
“Peirce opened a new way of thinking that is still being pursued today in novel and exciting
ways by all those who have taken the pragmatic turn”. He then comments that it is surpris-
ing this “sea change” consists of “the fact of having found a via media between a dogmatic
appeal to the given and an unacceptable frictionless coherentism”. This is a serious misun-
derstanding. The importance that I ascribe to Peirce’s early essays is that he had a profound
insight into what was wrong with much of modern philosophy from Descartes to the
present. And what was required is a rethinking of philosophy – a rethinking that has epis-
temic, metaphysical, ontological, cosmological, social, ethical and political consequences.
The “classical” pragmatists shared Peirce’s sense of the need for a reconstruction of philo-
sophy in all its dimensions – although they came to this understanding by different routes.
As I suggested in my Prologue, this sense of rethinking philosophy – although it had its in-
dependent sources – is shared by Wittgenstein and Heidegger. That is why, despite irrecon-
cilable differences, which should not be ignored, we discover common themes in so much
of philosophy during the past 150 years. If I focus on these common themes it is because
they are too frequently ignored or distorted by the barriers we artificially establish between
different philosophical schools and traditions. I want to reiterate that The Pragmatic Turn
consists of a series of essays—a series of snapshots. Although I did focus on the ethical co-
sequences of James’ pluralism and Dewey’s democratic concerns, I would never want to
suggest that this was their only—or even their most important—contribution to the vitality
of the pragmatic tradition. I hope this is clear from my other writings on these pragmatic
thinkers. Finally I think the fact that commentators includes a Spanish, two Italian philos-
ophers and one working in an Irish university exemplifies my thesis that “today there is a
much more vigorous, extensive, and illuminating global discussion of the multifaceted as-
psects of pragmatism that at any time since its origins”.
Essays
David Ludwig

Beyond Physicalism and Dualism? Putnam’s Pragmatic Pluralism and the Philosophy of Mind

Abstract. Although Hilary Putnam has played a significant role in shaping contemporary philosophy of mind, he has more recently criticised its metaphysical foundations as fundamentally flawed. According to Putnam, the standard positions in the philosophy of mind rest on dubious ontological assumptions which are challenged by his “pragmatic pluralism” and the idea that we can always describe reality in different but equally fundamental ways. Putnam considers this pluralism about conceptual resources as an alternative to both physicalism and dualism. Contrary to physicalism, Putnam’s pluralism rejects the ontological priority of physical concepts. Contrary to dualism, pragmatic pluralism denies that equally fundamental conceptual systems refer to ontologically distinct realms of reality. The aim of this paper is to discuss and clarify the implications of Putnam’s pragmatic pluralism for the philosophy of mind. The first section introduces Putnam’s concept of conceptual relativity and his rejection of an absolute ontology. In the second section, I argue that conceptual relativity leads to a pragmatic pluralism which undermines the common ontological framework of physicalism and dualism. The third section explains how pragmatic pluralists can reject identity claims without being committed to dualism. The last section discusses the implications of Putnam’s pragmatic pluralism for the mind-body problem by focussing on phenomenal consciousness and mental causation.

Since the second half of the 20th century, philosophers of mind commonly consider physicalism and dualism as their only serious options: mental states are either material or immaterial states. While physicalism is usually taken as the default position, dualism looms in the background as the price philosophers have to pay if they abandon the goal of a naturalized mind. From a historical point of view, the almost exclusive opposition between physicalism and dualism is surprising as it ignores influential philosophical traditions such as idealism, neutral monism, and anti-metaphysical methodologies. However, none of these options have gained much support in contemporary philosophy of mind.

The emergence of physicalism as the default position in the philosophy of mind is closely related to the scientific realism and optimistic reductionism of early post-war philosophy in America and Australia. One of the most vivid illustrations of this early reductionist enthusiasm is Paul Oppenheim’s and Hilary Putnam’s 1956 article on the “Unity of Science as a Working Hypothesis”, which outlined the idea that all laws of science are reducible to the most fundamental laws of physics. Proposing different “reductive levels” such as “social groups”, “living things”, and “cells”, Oppenheim and Putnam assumed that every level is reducible to the next more fundamental level. By taking reductions to be transitive, they concluded that every level is at least in principle reducible to the most fundamental level of “particle physics” (Oppenheim and Putnam: 1956: 9).

In early post-war philosophy, behavioural psychology and neurobiology seemed to be the most promising disciplines for a reductive explanation of the mind and offered the foundations for the philosophical theories of behaviourism and type identity. The situation...
changed in the late 1950s when early cognitive scientists challenged the behaviouristic orthodoxy and claimed that internal representations had to be considered respectable scientific entities. In a series of papers published throughout the 1960s, Putnam outlined a philosophical interpretation of this cognitive revolution by taking mental states to be functional states rather than behavioural dispositions or brain states (reprinted in Putnam 1975a). However, these differences should not obscure a more fundamental agreement: behaviourism, type identity theory, and functionalism share the conviction that the sciences offer sufficient resources to explain the human mind as part of an ultimately physical reality.

Although Hilary Putnam has played a significant role in shaping philosophy of mind in the second half of the 20th century, he has more recently criticised its metaphysical foundations as fundamentally flawed. “[N]either the classical problems in the philosophy of mind nor the ‘philosophical positions’ they give rise to are completely intelligible” (Putnam 1999: 78). According to Putnam, we neither have to identify mental and physical states nor do we have to consider the mind as ontologically distinct from the physical world. Instead of physicalism or dualism, Putnam suggests a pragmatistic stance according to which different conceptual systems are justified in different contexts and do not have to be reduced to some single and fundamental ontology: “Mind talk is not talk about an immaterial part of us but rather a way of describing the exercise of certain abilities we possess, abilities that supervene upon the activity of our brains and upon all our various transactions with the environment but that do not have to be reductively explained using the vocabulary of physics and biology, or even computer science” (Putnam 1999: 38).

I. Conceptual relativity

Putnam’s discontent with mainstream philosophy of mind dates back to the 1980s, when he started to criticise not only his earlier functionalist account but also the very idea of a “naturalized intentionality”. As Putnam puts it in Representation and Reality: “I do not see any possibility of a scientific theory of the ‘nature’ of the intentional realm, and the very assumption that such a theory must be possible if there is anything to intentional phenomena at all is one that I regard as wholly wrong” (Putnam 1988: 109).

According to Putnam, the alternative to a “scientific theory of the ‘nature’ of the intentional realm” is not dualism but an “alternative picture” (Putnam 1988: 107) that requires the reconsideration of the metaphysical foundations of contemporary philosophy of mind. Putnam argues that physicalism and dualism share the assumption that there is one single and absolute description of reality while they disagree on how this description looks like. Physicalists claim that the absolute description of reality will only involve physical concepts while dualists assume that an absolute and complete description of reality will require physical and mental concepts. Contrary to physicalism and dualism, Putnam’s “alternative picture” rejects the very idea one single and absolute ontology and instead accepts that we can describe reality in terms of different but equally fundamental vocabularies.

At the core of Putnam’s alternative picture lies his argument for “conceptual relativity” which he has developed and defended over the course of 20 years (Putnam 1987, 1988, 2004). The general idea of conceptual relativity can be illustrated with everyday examples such as a room with a chair, a table on which there are a lamp and a notebook and a ballpoint pen, and nothing else, and I ask, ‘How many objects are there in this room?’ My companion answers, let us suppose, ‘Five.’ ‘What are they?’ I ask. ‘A chair, a table, a lamp, a note-
book, and a ballpoint pen. ‘How about you and me? Aren’t we in the room?’ My companion might chuckle. ‘I didn’t think that you meant I was to count people as objects. Alright, then, seven’. ‘How about the pages of the notebook?’ […] (Putnam 1988: 110)

Putnam’s conversation illustrates that ordinary language allows different descriptions of the imagined room. In some situations we might be inclined to count people as objects; in other situations we focus only on inanimate things. In some situations, we may count individual pages as objects, whereas in others this may not occur to us. Taking this even further, if we would put one of those pages under a microscope we would again create a very different context, in which we may feel inclined to count other objects, such as cells. It seems trivial that the different descriptions can be equally correct. How someone describes Putnam’s room depends on the context of the conversation and the linguistic preferences of the speaker. One way or another, our ordinary language allows us to describe Putnam’s room in different and equally correct ways.

Many philosophers insist that Putnam’s example only shows that our ordinary language is fuzzy and doesn’t help with the ontological question of how many objects really exist. In his 1987 paper “Truth and Convention”, Putnam introduced a simple example and two ontological theories which are commonly known as “ontological nihilism” and “ontological universalism”. Consider a world with three individuals (x1, x2, and x3) and the question of how many objects exist. The obvious difficulty is whether the individuals compose new objects such as “x2+x3” or “x1+x2+x3”. The most common solutions are the most radical ones: While Nihilists argue that objects never compose new objects (e.g. Dorr and Rosen 2002), universalists claim that objects always compose new objects (e.g. Van Cleve 2008).

In Putnam’s example, a nihilist claims that only three objects exist (x1, x2, x3) while a universalist assumes that seven objects (x1, x2, x3, x1+x2, x2+x3, x1+x3, x1+x2+x3) exist. The controversy is not limited to obscure philosophical examples but extends to the real world. Nihilists claim that only elementary particles are objects and conclude that ordinary objects such as chairs or oranges do not really exist. The ontological claims of universalists are equally shocking as they claim that every object composes a new object with every other object. There is even an object composed of your nose and Immanuel Kant’s grave.

Putnam argues that these ontological theories are not fully intelligible. Consider the example in which the nihilist claims that three objects exist while the universalist assumes that seven objects exist. Nihilists and universalists both know that three individuals exist and they also agree on most of their properties such as their undivisibility or their spatial positions. Given their agreements it becomes increasingly unclear what they are disagreeing about as they simply seem to offer equally acceptable descriptions of the same situation. There is nothing wrong with counting only individuals as objects and there nothing wrong with counting compositions as objects, either. In some contexts nihilism or universalism may offer a more useful description, but there is no point in debating how many objects really exist.

The situation is equally puzzling in the case of real world applications of nihilism and universalism. If you think that there is a beer in your fridge while your friend thinks that you ran out of beer, you have a perfectly understandable disagreement. When nihilists claim that there is no beer in your fridge, something else is going on because they claim that beer (contrary to “beer-wise arranged particles”) does not really exist. However, what does it mean that beer does not really exist while beer-wise arranged particles exist? It seems that we do not have a grip on what it would be for a beer to really exist and nihilists do not offer any explanations that help to understand their ontological claims (Chalmers
Universalists face the same problem: what does it mean that your nose and Immanuel Kant’s grave really compose a new object? Do we understand the difference between them composing an object and them not composing an object?

What is the alternative to this ontological debate? According to Putnam, the alternative is to embrace “conceptual relativity” and to dismiss the idea of one single and absolute ontology. As long as one accepts the ideal of an absolute ontology, the question of how many objects really exist seems unavoidable. Contrary to this ontological standpoint, Putnam’s theory of conceptual relativity argues that there is not one single correct way to talk about the existence of objects. Some ways to talk about objects may be more useful than others, but that does not mean that there is one fundamental or absolute description.

Conceptual relativity is not limited to an esoteric ontological debate about the number of objects but has general consequences for the understanding of ontology. If ontology aims at one single and absolute description of reality, then there is something fundamentally wrong with the whole project:

In place of Ontology (note the capital ‘O’), I shall be defending what one might call pragmatic pluralism, the recognition that it is no accident that in everyday language we employ many different kinds of discourses, discourses subject to different standards and possessing different sorts of applications, with different logical and grammatical features – different ‘language games’ in Wittgenstein’s sense – no accident because it is an illusion that there could be just one sort of language game which could be sufficient for the description of all of reality! (Putnam 2004: 21)

II. Pragmatic pluralism and reductive explanation

While Putnam’s discussion of conceptual relativity has profoundly influenced contemporary debates about realism and ontology, philosophers of mind tend to ignore these issues and seem to consider them as irrelevant for their “philosophical sub-discipline”. Contrary to this assumption, I want to argue that conceptual relativity is of crucial importance for Putnam’s claim that the standard positions in the philosophy of mind are not completely intelligible. However, it will be necessary to generalize the discussion and to focus on the idea of conceptual or pragmatic pluralism as it has been introduced by Putnam in *Ethics without Ontology* (2004):

In *Representation and Reality* I counted the fact that we might describe “the contents” of a room very differently by using first the vocabulary of fundamental physical theory and then again the vocabulary of tables and lamps and so on as a further instance of conceptual relativity and this, I now think, was a mistake, although it is an instance of a related and wider phenomenon I should have called conceptual pluralism. The fact that the contents of a room may be partly described in two very different vocabularies cannot be an instance of conceptual relativity in the sense just explained, because conceptual relativity always involves descriptions which are cognitively equivalent [...] but which are incompatible if taken at face value (Putnam 2004: 48).

Putnam’s differentiation between conceptual relativity and conceptual pluralism corresponds with the distinction between horizontal and vertical pluralism as discussed by Huw Price (1992) and Michael Lynch (2001: 6–8). Horizontal pluralism is the claim that there can be different but equally fundamental descriptions on one conceptual level while vertical pluralism assumes different but equally fundamental descriptions on different conceptual
levels. A simple way to illustrate the distinction is Putnam’s example of a room with a chair, a table, a lamp, a notebook, and a ballpoint pen. The fact that we can count the objects in the room in different ways is an instance of horizontal pluralism. Vertical pluralism claims that we can describe the room on different conceptual levels such as every day language or particle physics. Figure 1 offers a simple illustration of the distinction.

Horizontal pluralism claims that there can be different but equally fundamental descriptions in terms of everyday language (O1 & O2) or particle physics (P1 & P2) and describes the relation represented by the dashed lines. Vertical pluralism claims that the same situation can be described on different but equally correct conceptual levels (P1 & O1, P1 & O2, P2 & O1, P2 & O2) and describes the relation represented by the solid lines.

Horizontal pluralism is philosophically interesting because two descriptions on the same conceptual level often seem to contradict each other: how can there be exactly five objects and exactly seven objects in the same room at the same time? The puzzlement vanishes when we realize that there are different correct ways to talk about the existence of objects. If we only count macroscopic inanimate things in Putnam’s room, there will be five objects. If we count macroscopic inanimate things and people, there will be seven objects. If we also count microscopic things like cells, there will be far more objects. And so on.

Contrary to horizontal pluralism, vertical pluralism might seem to state an obvious and uncontroversial fact: who would deny that we can describe the world in terms of different concepts such as ordinary concepts and the concepts of particle physics? Of course, some philosophers reject conceptual systems such as “folk psychology” as dysfunctional, but even the most dedicated eliminative materialist would not deny that we need different conceptual resources. An eliminative materialist might argue that a psychotherapist should work on a purely neurological level, but she would certainly not suggest replacing psychological concepts with microphysical concepts.

The pragmatic need for a plurality of conceptual systems is undeniable and might raise the question whether vertical pluralism is an interesting philosophical position. However, Putnam’s pragmatic pluralism goes an important step further by claiming that none of these conceptual systems can claim ontological priority in the sense of providing an absolute description of reality. “That we can use [different conceptual] schemes without being required to reduce one or both of them to some single fundamental and universal ontology is the doctrine of pluralism” (Putnam 2004: 49).

Pragmatic pluralism has important ontological as well as epistemological implications. Ontologically, pragmatic pluralism challenges both physicalism and dualism. Contrary to physicalists, Putnam rejects the idea that physical concepts are ontologically prior to all.
non-physical concepts. In the case of a room that is described in terms of ordinary language and particle physics, we simply have two correct descriptions of reality and do not need to claim that our ordinary concepts are somehow ontologically inferior. Putnam’s examples of conceptual relativity can illustrate the argument: there is no need to decide whether nihilists or universalists (or some one else) offer the fundamental description of reality as there are simply different ways to talk about the existence of objects. In the same sense, there is no need to offer one single fundamental description of the room that can be described in terms of ordinary language and particle physics. Instead, we have to take the plurality of conceptual systems seriously. Some conceptual systems will turn out more useful than others in a given context but there is simply no point in claiming that one of them describes the world in terms of an absolute ontology.

Although Putnam denies the ontological priority of the physical description, he does not subscribe to a version of dualism or ontological pluralism, either. Ontological pluralism assumes that different and equally fundamental conceptual systems refer to ontologically distinct realms of reality. A clear example is Karl Popper’s theory of three worlds in which three irreducible conceptual systems correspond with three ontologically distinct kinds of entities (Popper 1978). Contrary to ontological pluralism and dualism, Putnam does not assume that equally conceptual systems imply ontologically distinct realms of reality. Again, conceptual relativity can help to understand the argument. In the case of a room with three individuals, nihilists and universalists offer different but equally fundamental descriptions. However, that does not mean that there are two ontologically distinct realms of reality – a nihilistic reality with three objects and a universalistic reality with seven objects. In the same sense, pragmatic pluralism does not imply ontological gaps between the referents of different concepts. If we describe a room in terms ordinary language and particle physics we do not describe two ontologically distinct realms of reality but we describe the same room in terms of different conceptual systems.

Pragmatic pluralism undermines the common framework of physicalism and dualism by denying that we need to describe reality in terms of one single and absolute ontology. Putnam’s alternative picture, however, does not only challenge ontological but also epistemological assumptions: as long as philosophers of mind take a physicalistic ontology as the default position, the need for reductive explanations seems obvious. If we assume that a fundamental physical theory describes everything that really exists, we also have to be able (at least in principle) to explain everything else in terms of that physical theory. A physicalist might grant that we can describe humans in terms of different conceptual systems such as particle physics, biology, scientific psychology, folk psychology, and so on. However, if these descriptions are true and a fundamental physical theory describes everything that really exists, then it must be possible to reduce them to the fundamental physical theory.

Given the physicalistic framework of an absolute physical ontology, reductionism appears as an inevitable consequence. However, within Putnam’s alternative picture of pragmatic pluralism, the reductionist argument loses its persuasiveness. A pragmatic pluralist will admit that the world can be described with physical concepts but reject their ontological priority and the idea that all non-physical concepts must be considered derivative. An example can help to illustrate the difference: we can describe humans as physical systems, biological organisms, psychological subjects, and so on. If we assume that humans are really just physical systems, then we have to explain how our biological or psychological descriptions can fit in this ontological framework. Pragmatic pluralism accepts that we can describe humans also as physical systems but denies that this description is ontologically prior to our biological or psychological description. But if we assume that the physical de-
scription is not ontologically prior to other descriptions, the need for reductive explanations vanishes.

To say that pragmatic pluralism rejects reductionism does not mean that reductive explanations cannot be successful. However, there is no reason to believe that they must be successful.

III. The Limits of Identity Talk

According to Putnam, pragmatic pluralism offers an alternative to both dualism and physicalism by undermining their common assumption of an absolute ontology. Dualists make the mistake of considering the existence of irreducible conceptual systems as sufficient for the existence of non-physical entities. Physicalists make the opposite mistake of taking the rejection of non-physical entities to imply one single and absolute physical perspective. Both miss the possibility of different descriptions of the same reality which are neither reducible to an absolute ontology nor refer to ontologically distinct realms of reality.

Most philosophers of mind won’t be convinced by Putnam’s alternative picture. One way of articulating doubts is to ask whether pragmatic pluralists accept the identity of mental and physical states. The question seems to imply a dilemma for Putnam’s rejection of physicalism and dualism: if he accepts the identity of mental and physical states, then his theory leads to a version of non-reductive physicalism. If he denies the identity of mental and physical states, then pragmatic pluralism is committed to the existence of non-physical entities and therefore some kind of dualism. As Putnam puts it: “Much of the appeal of the ‘identity theory’ has always had its source in the fear of being driven to the supposed opposite horn the dilemma that either we must opt for some form of identity theory (or perhaps eliminative materialism), or else be forced back to the dark old days of dualism” (Putnam 1999: 37).

A pragmatic pluralist may respond to this objection by accepting the identity of mental and physical states while insisting that identity is not sufficient for physicalism. Identity is a symmetrical relation while physicalists assume the priority of the physical. Identity without the priority of the physical might lead to some form of neutral monism but not to physicalism. Therefore, physicalists do not only have to establish the identity of mental and physical states but have to justify the priority of the physical.

Although a pragmatic pluralist might accept the identity of mental and physical states, Putnam’s response is much more radical as he argues “that the notion of identity has not been given any sense in this context. We cannot, for example (as I once thought we could), employ the model of theoretical identification derived from such famous successful reductions such as the reduction of thermodynamics to statistical mechanics, because that model assumes that both the reduced theory and the reducing theory have a well-defined body of laws” (Putnam 1999: 85). According to Putnam, we do not really understand the identity question and we can avoid the dilemma by avoiding confused (and confusing) questions. Identity talk makes perfect sense in some contexts such as theoretical identification but that doesn’t mean that identity talk makes sense in every context.

Of course, theoretical identification as described by Putnam is not the only way to establish an identity relation. If we identify “Hilary Putnam” and “the author of Renewing Philosophy”, there will be no theoretical identification involved. A different model for the identification of entities is suggested by the principle of the Identity of Indiscernibles: if we can establish that everything that is true about x is also true about y, then we can conclude
that x and y are identical. “Hilary Putnam” and “the author of Renewing Philosophy” are both born in 1926, married to Ruth Anna Putnam, friends of Jürgen Habermas, and so on. If we find out that everything that is true about Hilary Putnam is also true about the author of Renewing Philosophy, we can conclude that they are in fact the same person.

Although the Identity of Indiscernibles offers another model for identity talk, it doesn’t prove that identity claims make sense in every context. Putnam’s rejection of the identity question may seem puzzling at first but I think that his stance can be clarified by reconsidering his examples for pragmatic pluralism. In the case of a room that can be described in terms of ordinary language and particle physics, one might wonder whether ordinary objects such as tables are identical with arrangements of elementary particles.

The converse of the Identity of Indiscernibles tells us that identity entails indiscernibility: if x and y are identical, everything that is true about x is also true about y. Ordinary objects and arrangements of elementary particles fail to meet this criterion: The table in the room may be five years old while the arrangement of elementary particles that constitute the table is constantly changing and certainly not five years old. There is no arrangement of elementary particles with the same life-span as the table. Therefore, not everything that is true about the table is also true about any arrangement of elementary particles and they are not identical.

Furthermore, it is not even clear what arrangement of elementary particles a table could be identified with. The spatial borders of a table are obviously sharp enough for our everyday usage but they are not sharp enough to satisfy an ontologist who wants to identify the table with one specific arrangement of elementary particles. We won’t be able to tell where the table begins on a subatomic level and cannot single out one arrangement of elementary particles as identical with the table.

It is by no means a new discovery that identity talk reaches its limits when we try to describe the relation between ordinary objects and elementary particles. It is also not the only limit of identity talk as the debates about material constitution (Rudder-Baker 1997), determinates and determinables (Yablo 1992), as well as sets and sub-sets (Sanford 2005) illustrate. However, philosophers of mind still largely assume “we must opt for some form of identity theory (or perhaps eliminative materialism), or else be forced back to the dark old days of dualism” (Putnam 1999: 37). How is that possible?

The main reason seems to be the worry that the rejection of identity claims implies the assumption of new entities and an inflated ontology. If we claim that ordinary objects are not identical with arrangements of elementary particles, don’t we have to assume that they are ontologically distinct and therefore constitute an additional realm of reality? The result seems to be a bizarre pluralistic ontology of countless ontologically distinct objects (see Sosa 1993: 620).

Although this worry might be justified within the framework of an absolute ontology, Putnam’s pragmatic pluralism offers an answer: the limits of identity talk are not explained by an inflated ontology but a plurality of ways to talk about the existence of objects. This point becomes especially clear in the case of conceptual relativity: if we consider Putnam’s example of a room with three individuals, we seem to reach another limit of identity talk: the universalist’s composed objects are not identical with any of the nihilist’s objects. However, that doesn’t mean that we need two realms of reality – one for the universalistic and one for the nihilistic objects. Rather, it means that we need to accept that there are different ways to talk about the existence of objects. While it is correct to claim that the object “x1+x2” exists given the nihilist’s vocabulary, the same claim would be wrong given the universalist’s vocabulary. As existence claims are true or wrong relative to our conceptual
decisions, we do not need an inflated absolute ontology that contains both universalist’s and nihilist’s objects.

The moral of these examples is that Putnam’s rejection of the identity claims does not lead to dualism or an inflated ontology. The limits of identity talk are not restricted to the philosophy of mind but ubiquitous if we try to describe the relationship between different conceptual systems. According to Putnam, mind talk does not refer to a distinct realm of reality but “is rather a way of describing the exercise of certain abilities we possess” (Putnam 1999: 37). These descriptions require concepts that are very different from the concepts of particle physics and it is by no means surprising that we cannot describe the relationship between mental and physical states in terms of identity statements.

IV. Renewing Philosophy of Mind

So far, I have tried to explain Putnam’s claim “that neither the standard problems in the philosophy of mind nor the ‘philosophical positions’ they give rise to are really intelligible” (Putnam 1999: 112) by presenting pragmatic pluralism as an alternative to physicalism and dualism. Contrary to physicalists, Putnam does not accept the ontological priority of physical descriptions and instead insists on a “plurality of conceptual resources, of different but not mutually reducible vocabularies” (Putnam 1999: 38). Contrary to dualists, Putnam denies that irreducible concepts imply the existence of ontologically distinct realms of reality. Given these arguments, it is not hard to see why Putnam thinks that the entire discussion of the mind-body problem needs a careful reconsideration.

Some of the most common presentations of the mind-body-problem are based on the irreducibility of phenomenal or intentional states and already presuppose that irreducibility is something mysterious. Consider the case of phenomenal consciousness or qualia. Often, the problem is introduced as an “explanatory gap” between our physical (or biological or computational) and phenomenal accounts. No matter how detailed our physical descriptions are, they do not imply the existence of phenomenal consciousness. Cognitive science and neuroscience advance rapidly, but there remains the explanatory gap of an unreduced phenomenal consciousness. In the past 40 years, philosophers of mind have developed a large variety of examples and thought experiments that illustrate the explanatory gap:

*Bats (Nagel 1974): What is it like to be a bat? Confronted with this question, we might turn to zoologists, ethologists and cognitive neuroscientists who will be able to tell us a lot about the behaviour and cognitive structure of bats, about their perception, memory, and so on. None of this, however, will imply anything about the phenomenal experience of bats. For example, scientists may inform us about the details of echolocation but they won’t have anything to say about what it feels like to perceive the world by sonar. Therefore, there seems to be an unbridgeable gap between our biological knowledge and the phenomenal aspect of reality.

*Mary (Jackson 1982): Image Mary, a superscientist, who grows up in a black and white room and has never seen colours in her whole life. However, she receives an extraordinary education and learns everything about colour perception. Finally, she leaves her prison and sees colours for the first time. Although Mary had already a complete physical account colour perception before she was freed, it still seems obvious that Mary learns something new about the visual experience of colours when she sees colours for the first
time. Therefore, even complete physical information not sufficient to bridge the gap to phenomenonal consciousness.

*Zombies* (Chalmers 1996): Imagine a philosophical zombie, i.e. a person who lacks phenomenal consciousness but has the biological and behavioural structure of a normal human being. How do we know that philosophical zombies do not exist? It seems that empirical sciences cannot answer that question as one can imagine all the physical (or biological or computational) processes without the occurrence of phenomenal consciousness. No matter how detailed a physical description of humans is, nothing seems to make philosophical zombies inconceivable. Therefore, there is an unbridgeable explanatory gap between our physical and phenomenal descriptions.

Examples such as Nagel’s bats, Jackson’s Mary, and Chalmers’ zombies present the mind-body problem in terms of a gap between physical and phenomenal accounts of reality. Given the assumption of a physicalistic ontology, the problem is obvious: if physicalism is true, phenomenal states are nothing but physical states. And if phenomenal states are nothing but physical states, it must be possible to explain it in terms of a physical theory.

While the “explanatory gap” remains an obvious and pressing problem for physicalism, there is nothing mysterious about the irreducibility of phenomenal consciousness in the framework of pragmatic pluralism. Pragmatic pluralism rejects the idea of one single and absolute ontology and instead insists on different but equally fundamental conceptual systems. As consequence, there is nothing surprising and certainly nothing mysterious about the fact that phenomenal concepts are not physically explicable.

Putnam’s claim that the standard problems in the philosophy of mind are not fully intelligible can be partly understood by showing that many formulations of the mind-body problem depend on the assumption that irreducibility is something mysterious. If one gives up the idea that there must be a reductive explanation of the mind, neither the irreducibility of phenomenal consciousness nor the irreducibility of intentionality come as a surprise.

While the rejection of reductionism undermines many well-known formulations of the mind-body problem, philosophers of mind often argue that non-reductive theories do not constitute viable alternatives as they fail to explain mental causation. For example, Jaegwon Kim (1993: 250-255, 281-292) has argued that non-reductive theories of the mind face a “causal exclusion problem” which ultimately leads to epiphenomenalism. Consider a simple example of mental causation such as a headache being the cause for taking a pain killer. While the headache seems to be causally relevant, there is also a purely biological explanation of the behaviour. Thus, there are at least two potential causes:

(C1) The headache is the cause for taking a pain killer.
(C2) The biological process b is the cause for taking a pain killer.

Reductive physicalists have a simple solution for the apparent overdetermination: a headache is nothing but a biological process and (C1) can be reduced to (C2). Non-reductive theories cannot make this move and seem to be committed to overdetermination. However, a systematic overdetermination would be utterly mysterious as is would imply that every mental cause is accompanied by an ontologically distinct biological cause. If there is no explanation for this systematic overdetermination, non-reductive theories end up with a bizarre metaphysical picture. But if overdetermination is not an option, non-reductive theories will have to give up either (C1) or (C2). Giving up (C2) would come at
the very high price of claiming that there is no sufficient biological or physical cause of mentally caused behaviour. According to Kim, this rejection of the “causal closure of the physical domain” cannot be considered a serious option, which leaves non-reductive theories of the mind with the epiphenomenalist rejection of (C2).

Kim’s exclusion argument seems to create a fatal dilemma for non-reductive theories: mental causes are either physical or non-physical causes. If they are physical causes, then non-reductive theories are wrong and we need a reductive explanation of mind. If mental causes are not physical, then they compete with physical causes for causal relevance and finally end up as causally irrelevant.

While Kim’s exclusion argument might be convincing in case of some non-reductive theories, it clearly fails to threaten Putnam’s pragmatic pluralism. Remember that pragmatic pluralism is not a version of dualism or ontological pluralism and does not assume that our psychological and physical concepts refer to ontologically distinct entities. Rather than postulating ontologically distinct realms of reality, Putnam insists that we can describe the same human being in terms of very different conceptual systems such as particle physics, biology, scientific psychology, folk psychology, and so on. But if there is no ontological gap between physical and mental, then there is also no systematic overdetermination but simply different and equally fundamental ways to talk about causes. As Putnam puts it by quoting John Haldane: “there are ‘as many kinds of ‘cause’ as there are senses of ‘because’” (Putnam (1999: 137), see also El-Hani and Philström (2002) for a similar response to the exclusion problem).

To clarify this argument, I want to suggest a thought experiment. Imagine that the Linnaean Society is concerned about the declining hedgehog population in Malta and sends two biologists to the island to investigate the phenomenon. While the biologists conduct their field work together, they write two separate reports. Surprisingly, they seem to come to contradictory results:

**Biologist I:** The genus of kites (*Milvus*) is the cause of the declining hedgehog population. Since kites hunt hedgehogs and are common in Malta, the hedgehog population is under pressure.

**Biologist II:** The genus of hawks (*Accipitrinae*) is the cause of the declining hedgehog population. Since hawks hunt hedgehogs and are common in Malta, the hedgehog population is under pressure.

A closer look at the research reports makes the situation even more puzzling: the biologists made most of their observations together and their descriptions are consistent with each other in almost every detail. Only one difference stands out: Whenever one of the biologists reports an attack by a kite, the other biologist describes an attack by a hawk. The two research reports seem to suggest systematic overdetermination of kite- and hawk-attacks on hedgehogs. How is that possible?

The puzzle disappears as soon as we learn that the two biologists use different taxonomies: one biologist considers kites to belong to the genus of hawks, while the other describes kites and hawks as two different genera. In such a situation, the problem of overdetermination disappears immediately because we are dealing not with two different causes, but only with two different descriptions of the same cause.

The obvious moral of the thought experiment is that different biological taxonomies lead to different causal descriptions but not to instances of overdetermination or causal
competition. Different taxonomies do not causally compete with each other as they simply describe the causes in terms of different conceptual systems. According to pragmatic pluralism, the same is true in the case of mental and physical causation. We can describe the causes of human behaviour in terms of different conceptual systems such as physics, biology, or psychology. They might be equally fundamental in the sense that they cannot be reduced to some single and absolute ontology but that does not mean that they refer to ontological distinct realms of reality. And if there are no ontologically distinct causes, then there is also no overdetermination or causal competition.

The debates on phenomenal consciousness and mental causation illustrate Putnam’s claim that not only the standard positions but also the most common problems in the philosophy of mind rest on dubious ontological assumptions. The idea of one single and absolute description of reality turns irreducibility into an unsolvable problem and obscures our understanding of causation by assuming one single and absolute description of causal processes. Pragmatic pluralism does not only require to rethink our metaphysical options in the philosophy of mind but challenges the entire framework in which the mind-body problem has been discussed since the second half of the 20th century.

References


Vitaly Kiryushchenko

*Logic, Ethics and Aesthetics: Some Consequences of Kant’s Critiques in Peirce’s Early Pragmatism*

I.

The relationship between logic and ethics is one of the basic and most essential questions of classical philosophical analysis. Since the time of the Pythagoreans, the fundamental unity of the two – whether by means of vague intuition, an elaborate conceptual scheme, or even a carefully crafted lifestyle – has led philosophers to identify truth and virtue. In his critical philosophy Kant put this unity of truth and virtue to extensive and rigorous trial to determine what conditions, if any, allow us to intelligibly answer the question of how knowledge, or an obvious inner belief turns into a necessary motivation of the will, or, in other words, how belief can be interpreted as both an intelligible object and a source for action. In 1790 Kant gave his conclusive answer to this question in *Critique of Judgment*, which was an attempt to reconcile, in terms of aesthetics, a set of contradictions that arose between his 1st and 2nd *Critiques*, i.e. between his logical and ethical doctrines, to be discussed below.

Although throughout the development of his thought Peirce made several decisive moves away from the mainstream of Kant’s first two *Critiques*, in his early years, Kant’s critical philosophy was the object of his steady interest. Besides, in Peirce’s case, Kantian influence was mediated and greatly diversified by intensive reading of Hegel and German Romantics, as well as by lessons in logic and mathematics from his father Benjamin Peirce (MS 310: 823; Colapietro 2006: 173-174, 196). This mediation greatly enriched Peirce’s perception of Kantian critical approach – to such an extent that much later, in his 1902 application to Carnegie grant, Peirce avouched that “Kant’s criticism was, so to say, my mother’s milk in philosophy” (L 75). It is this beverage that made Peirce immune to the deficiencies of empiricist tradition (Short 2007: 66-67, 81-83), especially with respect to his doctrine of categories (Friedman 1996). Moreover, mature Peirce, although he was highly critical towards Kant, praised him for the fact that he based metaphysics on logic, as well as for a decisive emphasis he laid on the idea of architectonics (Nordmann 2006; Parker 1998, 2-59). Therefore, given the high complexity of Kantian themes in Peirce’s writings, whatever interpretation one may feel inclined to, it is widely recognized that Peirce’s pragmatism, both as a whole and in any particular stage of its development, may certainly not be adequately understood either as a plain repudiation of Kant or simply as a version of Neo-Kantianism (Murphey 1968, Rosenthal 2002).

However, an analysis of major strands of Kantian influence on Peirce, as well as an exhaustive account of the relationship between logic, ethics and aesthetics in Peirce’s pragmatism is beyond the purview of the present paper. Its principal aim is to display, against the highly complex background of this relationship, one curious way in which the very composition of Kant’s principal arguments in 1st and 2nd *Critiques* is reflected in some of Peirce’s early writings, and in his “On a New List of Categories” and “The Fixation of Belief” in particular. This compositional affinity deserves attention as it may serve two purposes. On the one hand, it shows how Kantian idea of architectonics revealed in the very structure of
his critical arguments is visible already in Peirce’s early texts; on the other hand, it helps to account for certain textual circumstances that accompanied Peirce’s first decisive step out of the mainstream of Kantian critical philosophy.

As to the background in question, although the problem of the relationship between logic and ethics stands out significantly in Peirce’s philosophy throughout all stages of its development, it is only in the end of the 1890’s that Peirce first explicitly undertakes the task of systematically articulating his conception of ethics as a normative science. The case of aesthetics, which plays an important meditational role in Kant’s 3rd Critique, is even more intricate. In a draft to his fifth Harvard lecture (“The Three Normative Sciences”) delivered on 30 April 1903 in Sever Hall Peirce wrote:

… although the first year of my study of philosophy was devoted to this branch exclusively, yet I have since then so completely neglected it that I do not feel entitled to have any confident opinions about it. I’m inclined to think that there is such a normative science; but I feel by no means sure even of that (EP2: 200).

Later on, in the period of time between the reformulation of his maxim in 1903 and the proof of pragmatism in 1907 MS 318, Peirce had proposed a developed, even if somewhat sketchy view on aesthetics built in the framework of his architectonics. Incorporating aesthetics and establishing its priority over logic and ethics, Peirce’s architectonics finally connected his normative theory with his evolutionary metaphysics and doctrine of categories (Potter 1967: 3-71).

Thus, on the one hand, there is a considerable gap in Peirce’s writings which in any way discuss or even simply touch the problem as stated by Kant, so that aesthetics and its role as a mediator between logic and ethics appears to be an apophasis for Peirce. On the other hand, it has been justly argued that on many occasions aesthetics can be considered as an unnamed undercurrent of Peirce’s thought, that it is often implicitly referred to by Peirce as the science which is “concerned with relationships and processes by which relations between Appearances and Reality, between Cognition and Idea, between Icon and Symbol … grow and evolve with respect of social values represented” (Kevelson 1994: 218).

However, given Peirce’s early interest in Kant, and with due regard for the crucial role the relationship between logic and ethics played in Kant’s critical philosophy, Peirce could not have completely overlooked the solution Kant himself set forth in terms of aesthetic judgment in the 3rd Critique. Meanwhile, he never criticized this solution directly – with the exception of a few remarks on the fact that Kant and some other German thinkers “limit it <aesthetics> to taste, that is, to the action of the Spieltrieb from which deep and earnest emotion would seem to be excluded” (EP2: 378). In his 1906 “Basis of Pragmatism in the Normative Sciences” Peirce defines aesthetics (or esthetics, as he preferred to call it) as a theory aimed at describing the deliberate formation of “a habit of feeling which has grown up under the influence of a course of self-criticisms and of hetero-criticisms” (EP2, 378). It has been suggested that Peirce paid little attention to the 3rd Critique due to his “fixation on logic” (Kaag 2005: 517; Anderson 1995: 21). However, being integrated by Kant in one architectonic whole, none of Kant’s three critical arguments can be properly understood in isolation from two others, and it is very unlikely that Peirce, a careful and thorough thinker, was not aware of this. Therefore, while the suggestion is plausible, whether Peirce read Critique of Judgment carefully enough or was acquainted with its main ideas only through the Romantics, this lack of attention to aesthetics might also have some other reasons.
Of course, the very first formulation of the maxim of pragmatism in “How to Make Our Ideas Clear” appears to be a solution alternative to that of Kant: the meaning of a concept consists in nothing else but the sum total of conceivable practical results of actions one is prepared to undertake in case he believes that the concept would hold good in such and such particular circumstances. If so, belief really is consistently interpretable as both an intelligible object and something that can “truly guide our actions so as to satisfy our desires” (W3: 247) – without the necessity to appeal to the mediating power of aesthetic judgment. Knowledge, in this case, comes out to be grounded in social practices and cannot be epistemologically approached as a context-free synthesis of ideas.

But if the maxim is a solution, and if Peirce, an admirer of Kant by his own admission, successfully reformulates the Kantian problem without resort to any detailed analysis of the Critique of Judgment, it might be worth trying to trace some of Peirce’s early writings for a possible explanation. The reasons of this disregard may become somewhat clearer if we keep in mind the mediating role pure reflective judgment plays in Kant’s critical philosophy together with some points of intersection and compositional concordances between some of Peirce’s early writings and Kant’s first two Critiques, to be presented below.

II.

For the sake of further analysis, a brief outline of three Kantian critical arguments is in order. The arguments may be presented as the next-to-last, prior to Hegel step towards the conclusion of the classical rationalist tradition. This step took the form of three Critiques conceived as consecutive systematic attempts at bridging rationalist and empiricist extremes in interpretation of three human faculties: the faculty of knowledge, the faculty of desire, and the faculty of the feeling of pleasure and pain (Deleuze 1984). When knowledge, desire and feeling fully depend on experience, they appear in their lower forms, i.e. judgments pertaining to them are defined as only a posteriori and presupposing neither universality nor necessity. On the rationalist side, then, this raises the principal question as to whether – and how – each of these faculties “is capable of a higher form … when it finds in itself the law of its own exercise” (Deleuze 1984: 4). In other words, the question is how knowledge, desire and feeling taken as the results of a priori syntheses may be independent of experience (may not be derived from experience), given that they are applicable only to the objects of experience. To answer this question, Kant further introduces the notions of understanding, reason and imagination which play different roles in analysis of the faculties. Depending on various interrelations between these three within each of the faculties, Kant presents logical, ethical and aesthetical sides of his critical approach.

Unlike Descartes in his Meditations, a generic version of rationalist metaphysics, Kant treats knowledge not as an immediate and infallible translation of relations between things “out there” in the world into certain states of one’s soul, but as the result of category-constrained observation: understanding reduces the synthesis of perceptions to concepts that provide knowledge. Both thinking and existence presuppose unifying forms. The corresponding sections of the Transcendental Aesthetics and the Transcendental Analytic introduce two forms of representation: time and space as two forms of intuition, on the one hand, and categories of the understanding, on the other hand. It is the application of the two forms to one another that makes the process of knowledge possible. However, Kant adds another, third dimension to this dyadic relationship: the possibility of bringing the forms of representation together requires that there is something connecting categories, on the one hand, and phenomena, on the other, i.e. something that shares both the intellectual and the
phenomenal nature. It appears, then, that understanding provides the unity of the manifold of experience in space and time by appealing to some third, intermediate structure. This intermediate structure Kant calls the “transcendental scheme”, which – and this is an extremely important point of the 1st Critique (in its 2nd edition) – is always a product of the imagination, or something that, in Peirce’s terms, we conceive to be such and such. It is neither a percept, nor a concept, but something that, for Kant, interprets one into the other, as it is “homogeneous on the one hand with the category, and on the other hand with the appearance, and which thus makes the application of the former to the latter possible” (KRV: B 177). It might be noteworthy, though, that Peirce refers to Kantian transcendental schematism in its 1st edition version, as “a determination of intuition by a concept through the reproductive imagination” (CP 5.531). John Kaag notes that in this definition “Kant offers us a moment of continuity that appears almost Peircean. It reflects an odd departure from the dualistic logic that grounds most of the Kantian corpus” (Kaag 2005: 520).

However, firstly, in Kant, the fact of the logical unity between the two remains a mystery and thus leaves a conceptual gap within the 1st Critique, the gap which is filled by the notion of the transcendental scheme. Kant simply postulates the synthesis of impressions and doesn’t ask how it is accomplished, i.e. what are the consecutive steps of this accomplishment:

This schematism of our understanding, in its application to appearances and their mere form, is an art concealed in the depths of the human soul, whose real modes of activity nature is hardly likely ever to allow us to discover, and to have open to our gaze (KRV: B 180).

Secondly, a parallel gap appears in the 2nd Critique as the ethical problem of discontinuity between rational understanding and practical manipulation. These two – the rational understanding and the practical manipulation – unambiguously refer to the categories of understanding and the forms of intuition, this time taken as forms of activity. The controversy between the 1st Critique and the 2nd Critique is known as the classical problem of the moral value of knowledge. This, in turn, forms the central point of Kant’s 3rd Critique – the problem of the mediating power of aesthetic judgment to somehow reconcile the opposing extremes. How is this reconciliation accomplished?

It is important to note that, for Kant, the intelligibility of morality (just like, in terms of the 1st Critique, the applicability of categories to phenomena) depends on a difference between the potential and the real. Kant lays special stress on the fact that the world of nature is only a possibility that becomes real through human action. Although, presumably, this Kantian thesis is one of the principal fermenting elements of Peirce’s early pragmatism, for Kant it is only to the effect that there is a third gap, the one between the theoretical “Self of nature” and the practical “Self of freedom”. This latter difference, according to Kant, is inherent to moral consciousness, which seeks to reconcile the two in the imaginative reinterpretation of the schematism of understanding in aesthetic judgment, i.e. aesthetic or symbolic experience of freedom (KU, §59). What does Kant understand by “symbol” and just how does it help to solve the problem?

On the one hand, Kant says, a rational agent may know how he ought to act, but goes no further – he doesn’t know to what purpose he knows this, i.e. what the practical meaning of this knowledge is. The categorical imperative, i.e. the regulative principle that rules my desires and my conduct, gives the idea of freedom as a form for an outward action, while simultaneously expressing inward necessity. A practical agent, however, is able to think of
his own maxims as practical moral laws only if these latter involve purely formal foundation of will: these laws are abstracted from all sorts of subject-matter of the will, in favor of their universal form. Therefore, in terms of ethics, freedom is not given to human consciousness “as it is”, but only as a regulative principle, and its meaning is not accessible to any individual reasoning: the necessity of categorical imperative in Kant’s transcendental philosophy remains inscrutable. One cannot come to the idea of freedom through experience either, since in experience he has only the law that can be applied to phenomena, the law for the functioning of nature.

Again, the key problem is that Kant does not explain how to proceed from belief to action – for the reason that knowledge of a law as such does not constitute any action-guiding competence, i.e. does not prevent a practical agent from behavior that may well contradict such knowledge. There is only one person, according to Kant, who can see this picture differently (or, better say, vice versa): it is a genius, i.e. someone who does not obey the scheme, but changes it, and, if necessary, creates it anew. However, in terms of the 3rd *Critique*, the law of aesthetic judgment cannot be interpreted by an individual consciousness: one cannot rationalize why this particular something appears beautiful to him. Meantime, although no one is able to live in an aesthetically deficient world, the changes one makes as aesthetic creature always conform to the law that one cannot formalize.

Accordingly, just like 1st and 2nd *Critiques* reveal two ways to represent belief – as an intelligible object and a source for action, respectively – 2nd and 3rd *Critiques* form two series of argument which do not exist separately and always refer to one another: aware of the categorical imperative, I cannot work it into a finite set of practical habits; and conversely, not aware of the law of aesthetic judgment, I always have an idea of how to rearrange my setting. In short, Kant offers an interpretation of the logically structured knowledge into the ethically sound conduct by a symbol – a form of possibility, or an aesthetic idea, serving as a means of the moral Self’s self-objectifying. It is the power of aesthetic judgment, Kant says, that provides the possibility to correlate an object of freedom with an object of nature, thus rendering the world surrounding us a symbol of the moral, i.e. something that converts my “not understanding why” into symbolic experience of freedom.

Thus, it is *Critique of Judgment* that is undoubtedly the focal point of Kantian philosophy. It shows that the moral experience cannot be given as such without a medium, but can be rendered efficient (i.e. can be conceived as a rule which is able to guide conduct) by being symbolized in twofold logic-aesthetical form. On the one hand, ethical behavior is discrete; it cannot be immediately conceived as continuous experience (no one can consistently and continuously adjust his behavior to a formal rule). On the other hand, ethical behavior cannot acquire any particular practical meaning, but borrows from aesthetics the idea of the general law, which is to obey without asking any “why”.

So far we have witnessed the pervasive interdependence and symmetry of the steps taken by Kant in dealing with logical and ethical parts of his doctrine, that is, in his 1st and 2nd *Critiques*. Peirce, as will be shown, takes this symmetry into account, although only up to a certain point and with the proviso as to the role aesthetic experience plays in Kant’s critical philosophy.

**III.**

Curiously enough, although Peirce came to clearly formulate the role of the three normative sciences only towards the end of his life, his scattered notes referring to different sections of Kant’s *Critiques* can be traced back as far as 1857 through 1859:
The essential of a thing – the character of it – is the unity of the manifold therein contained. *Id est*, the logical principle, from which as major premises the facts thereof can be deduced. What are called a man’s principles however are only certain beliefs of his that he may or may not carry out. They therefore do not compose his character, but the general expression of the facts – the acts of his soul – does. … (MS 5: XXXVII).

It is impossible for a man to act contrary to his character. It is foolish for him to try to do it; he would be no better man for doing it since the character makes a man. The Very Law of the Growth of Character is contained in the character. …. (MS 5: XXXVI).

When a man begins to be hard pressed with his own passion and power, he sees the nonsense of guiding his conduct by any rule of God or man and the necessity there is of ex cogitating a manner of life of his own (MS 5: LVII).

Although this exemplar succession of fragments from Peirce’s early diary, chosen out of many others, does not in any way represent thorough conceptual analysis, to a careful reader of Kant it may give a fairly good idea of Peirce’s early thoughts as inspired by his studying of Kant’s 1st and 2nd *Critiques* together with Schiller and other Romantics.

In particular, the first of these early fragments unambiguously refers to that section of the “Transcendental Analytic” where Kant explains his notion of the synthetical unity of the manifold in intuition. (The next paragraph of this same section discusses the set of basic conceptions of this synthetical unity, i.e. Kant’s “Table of the Categories” – the primary subject of Peirce’s “On a New List of Categories” eight years later.) Translated into Kantian language, this short note says that whereas the synthesis of the manifold in intuition (i.e. the application of categories to phenomena) is logically non-problematic, the application of beliefs to possible conduct isn’t. It also might be important to add that this Peirce’s early use of belief here differs from Bain’s famous definition as “that upon which a man is prepared to act” and instead refers to the Kantian notion of “pragmatic belief”, which a man “may or may not carry out”, depending not on any sort of method or experimental results, but simply on the issues at stake. Kant’s 1st *Critique* offers the following definition:

> It often happens that someone propounds his views with such positive and uncompromising assurance that he seems to have entirely set aside all thought of possible error. A bet disconcerts him. Sometimes it turns out that he has a conviction which can be estimated at a value of one ducat, but not of ten. For he is very willing to venture one ducat, but when it is a question of ten he becomes aware, as he had not previously been, that it may very well be that he is in error. If, in a given case, we represent ourselves as staking the happiness of our whole life, the triumphant tone of our judgment is greatly abated; we become extremely diffident, and discover for the first time that our belief does not reach so far. Thus pragmatic belief always exists in some specific degree, which, according to differences in the interests at stake, may be large or may be small (KRV: A 825/B 853).

The remaining two fragments quoted above clearly suggest that by that time Peirce had already made his acquaintance with the works of Schiller and other Romantics whose aesthetic theories sought to reinterpret Kant’s *Critique of Judgment*. Although, as it has been noted above, remarkably, no explicit references to it can be traced in any of Peirce’s known writings, it is to be remembered that it was the Romantics who not only took the Kantian conception of aesthetic judgment to its limits, but also emphasized the role of a genius – a man, who, as 19-year-old Peirce writes somewhat grandiloquently, “begins to be hard pressed with his own passion and power” and finally “sees the nonsense of guiding his con-
duct by any rule of God or man “and “the necessity … of excogitating a manner of life of his own”. The main idea of Kant’s 3rd Critique, to which Peirce presumably alludes in these as well as some other early diary notes, appeals to experience that is beyond the scope of both theoretical knowledge and practical decisions – two focal themes in Kant’s first two Critiques. Kantian pure reflective judgment brings knowledge and moral conduct together, and in doing so, it relies neither on practical nor on theoretical pre-existent rules, but creates them anew. Due to the activity of the Kantian “productive imagination”, it neither prescribes any particular norms of conduct, nor provides any discursive knowledge, but, nevertheless, always takes the form of universally significant evaluation.

It is also remarkable that much later, after a long period during which Peirce wrote next to nothing on aesthetics, in his mature pragmatism aesthetic judgment changes its role substantially, but retains some of its important characteristics as described by Kant. Aesthetic judgments are warranted by the objectivity of ultimate ends and, as Hookway describes Peirce’s position, “in endorsing them we speak with a universal voice and demand the agreement of all rational agents. Although our belief that others will share these standards is not simply the product of an empirical induction, our claim to be autonomous rational agents controlling our own deliberations stands or falls with our right to speak with a universal voice about the acceptability of ultimate ends” (Hookway 1985, 62; emphasis added). On the one hand, just like in Kant’s case, aesthetics, as a science of admirable per se, plays in Peirce’s architectonics the role of a keystone: it makes his architectonics complete. But, on the other hand, it cannot, as it is, provide any justification or guarantee for a choice of an end. Peirce, therefore, unlike Kant, holds that the universal validity of such end remains only a matter of rational hope. Thus, Peirce agrees with Kant on the role of aesthetics, but not on the way it can be shown that the ends it provides are objectively valid. According to Peirce, the proper goal, in the case of aesthetics, is “to understand how standards adopted without justification can have objective validity, to explain how we can reasonably hold that the standards we adopt without justification are not psychologically determined but hold for all rational agents” (Hookway 1985: 59). According to Kant, aesthetic judgment is justified as a universally valid because it is the only possible symbolic link between an object of freedom and an object of nature. However, both for Peirce and for Kant aesthetic judgment presupposes a necessary connection between the pleasure I experience and the object which causes it—in spite of the fact that the “ought” which this aesthetic necessity involves is not based on any particular rule.

Back again to Peirce’s early years, from 1857 to 1859 he wrote four short Schiller-inspired papers: “The Sense of Beauty never furthered the Performance of a Single Act of Duty”, “Raphael and Michelangelo compared as men”, “Analysis of Genius”, and “The Axioms of Intuition after Kant” (W1: 1857-1866, 10-16, 31-36). These papers, although much different in terms of style and intention, implicitly ask one and the same question: If a genius, unlike an ordinary man, is the one who, in Kantian terms, has the aesthetic-based power to see a given totality of understanding as a law of Reason, what are the results of this power with respect to morality?

In trying to answer this puzzling question, Peirce gradually diverts from the strictly Kantian way. In his late recollections Peirce himself more or less precisely defined the timeframe of this diversion: he noted that during the years that passed between 1857, when he first met Chauncey Wright, and 1871, when the first meetings of the Metaphysical Club presumably were held in Cambridge, his “Kantism got whittled down to small dimensions.

* This might explain why Peirce eventually granted aesthetics the status of a normative science, despite the fact that his view on justifiability of aesthetic judgments appears to be somewhat weaker than Kant’s.
It was little more than a wire, – an iron wire, however” (MS 317). Shortly before the end of this period of time, in 1870 Peirce attended at least some of Wright’s lectures on the psychology of Alexander Bain at Harvard. It is in these lectures, among other things, Wright gave an account of Bain’s famous definition of belief – which was later in Peirce’s writings to take the place of the purely Kantian notion of pragmatic belief, the extended definition of which is quoted above. This may be read to mean that it is at some time toward the end of this period (i.e. during the few years prior to the founding of the Metaphysical Club) that Peirce’s views finally shifted away from the mainstream of Kantian thought – while preserving its principal framework and the acute attention Kant paid to the paradoxes of the practical Reason and intricate relationship between three normative sciences.

IV.

Peirce’s earliest noticeable breakaway from Kant’s logic is clearly shown in the comparison between the following well-known paragraphs from Kant’s “Transcendental Analytic” and Peirce’s “New List of Categories”, which are important for our further analysis:

(Kant): For the empirical consciousness which accompanies different representations is in itself diverse and without relation to the identity of the subject. That relation comes about, not simply through my accompanying each representation with consciousness, but only in so far as I conjoin one representation with another, and am conscious of the synthesis of them. Only in so far, therefore, as I can unite a manifold of given representations in one consciousness, is it possible for me to represent to myself the identity of the consciousness in [i.e. throughout] these representations. In other words, the analytic unity of a perception is possible only under the presupposition of a certain synthetic unity. The thought that the representations given in intuition one and all belong to me, is therefore equivalent to the thought that I unite them in one self-consciousness, or can at least so unite them; and although this thought is not itself the consciousness of the synthesis of the representations, it presupposes the possibility of that synthesis. In other words, only in so far as I can grasp the manifold of the representations in one consciousness, do I call them one and all mine. For otherwise I should have as many-coloured and diverse a self as I have representations of which I am conscious to myself (KRV: B133; emphasis added).

(Peirce): If we had but one impression, it would not require to be reduced to unity, and would therefore not need to be thought of as referred to an interpretant, and the conception of reference to an interpretant would not arise. But since there is a manifold of impressions, we have a feeling of complication or confusion, which leads us to differentiate this impression from that, and then, having been differentiated, they require to be brought to unity. Now they are not brought to unity until we conceive them together as being ours, that is, until we refer them to a conception as their interpretant. Thus, the reference to an interpretant arises upon the holding together of diverse impressions, and therefore it does not join a conception to the substance, as the other two references do, but unites directly the manifold of the substance itself. It is, therefore, the last conception in order in passing from being to substance (W2: 1867-1871, 54; emphasis added).

As these passages indicate, for Kant, self-consciousness implies the notion “I think” that must accompany all other notions for them to be comprehensible. In contrast, the Peircean pattern of interpreting, unlike self-consciousness, unites all other notions in a general idea in that it correlates them to something else in such a way as to give rise to the notion of representation: I represent something the correlation of which to something else is the only
guarantee of its comprehensiveness. The continuous act of correlation necessarily refers any given expression to its future conceived interpretations. Peirce’s “interpretant” grasps a multitude of impressions in an immediately perceived totality. It is a general term that, in bringing a multitude of experience to unity, doesn’t add any other concept to it, and, at the same time, makes the flow of experience continuous. While Kantian conceptual synthesis is simply postulated, in Peirce’s “New List” it acquires cognitive value only as a result of the process of interpretation.

In displaying his notion of interpretant, Peirce presumably refers to the 2nd chapter of “The Analytics of Concepts” (and to §24 “The Application of the Categories to Objects of the Senses in General” in particular), and “The Schematism of the Pure Concepts of Understanding” (Chapter I of the “Analytic of Principles”), where special emphasis is put on the spontaneous, or “productive” role of the imagination. Reinterpreting these sections, Peirce makes the possibility of knowledge dependent on the synthesis of impressions taken as a process explicable in its principle details. The synthesis is described not as an “art concealed in the depths of the human soul”, but as a continuous act of correlation which necessarily addresses any given expression to its possible interpretation. It acquires cognitive value through a set of modes of reference – quality, relation and representation, and their corresponding kinds of signification: likenesses, indices and general signs, or symbols. These forms of mediating reference constitute consecutive steps to cover a logical distance between the multitude of impressions and a concept. And the last mediating reference embodied in an interpretant “does not join a conception to the substance, as the other two references do, but unites directly the manifold of the substance itself” (W2: 54). The interpretant simply allows us to grasp the impressions as ours, thus replacing Kantian synthesis of apperception in self-consciousness with the idea of an intersubjective synthesis of meaning (Apel 1980: Ch. III). *

Thus, in his “On a New List of Categories” Peirce at first asks the Hegelian question of how the synthesis is accomplished. Like Hegel, Peirce interprets Kantian synthesis not as a pure self-positing (Selbst-Bestimmung), but as a process of interpretation, or continuous development. Logic, for him, can rely upon neither radical skepticism (Cartesian thought-experiment) nor some established epistemology (Kant’s transcendental deduction of categories), because logic’s principal problem lays not so much in clarifying the character or modes of being, but rather in semiotically approached functional features of its representation. In fact, for Peirce, being is representing.

Admittedly, describing Peirce’s early analysis of Kant as strictly Hegelian is, of course, problematic. Peirce’s attitude towards Hegel was in many ways contradictory, and oscillated between severe criticism and general acceptance. For example, on the one hand, in “A Guess at the Riddle”, Peirce writes: “My whole method will be found to be in profound contrast with that of Hegel; I reject his philosophy in toto” (W6: 1886-1890, 179). On the other hand, in an unnamed manuscript written in the same year, we read:

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* The analysis of Peirce’s idea of interpretant, which plays crucial role in his theory of signs throughout all stages of its development, has a longstanding history in Peirce studies, and of course there are numerous other interpretations of it: for example, the general account of it (Short 2007, Lalor 1997); its examination in relation to the notions of causation (Hulswit 2002), subjectivity (Colapietro 1989), information (De Tienne 2005), translation (Liszka 1990, Savan 1988), etc. It is also important to remember that, as Peirce gradually moved away from the mainstream of Kant’s Critiques, he made numerous modifications to the idea of interpretant, which cannot be taken into account here. As the present paper deals only with the earliest version of it, which was a direct result of Peirce’s reinterpretation of the Kantian table of categories, the approach most pertinent to our purposes is the one represented in Apel 1980.
Hegel, while regarding scientific men with disdain, has for his chief topic the importance
of continuity, which was the very idea the mathematicians and physicists had been chiefly
engaged in following out for three centuries. This made Hegel’s work less correct and ex-
cellent in itself than it might have been; and at the same time hid its true mode of affinity
with the scientific thought into which the life of the race had been chiefly laid up.… My
philosophy resuscitates Hegel, though in a strange costume (CP 1.41-42).

And again, in one of his letters to Edward Holden Peirce writes about possible advan-
tages of his evolutionist metaphysics for “philosophers and Hegelians (sic)” (L 200, CSP-
EH, 20.08.86). However, in spite of this, by the time of “New List”, in 1867, Peirce and
Hegel, regarding this particular Kantian problem, are en rapport in the main: whereas Kant
considers the unity of being and substance as an analytical fact, both Peirce’s “New List”
and Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* treat it as some sort of “logical adventure” in which
the result is not guaranteed from the start at all. Moreover, in both cases this unity under-
stood as a process inevitably refers to some regulative idea (Hegel’s “spiritual community”
and Peirce’s community of researchers). And the synthesis may be accomplished only pro-
vided it is addressed to this idea at every step.

V.

In 1877–1878 Peirce published his second series of articles, known as “Illustrations of
the Logic of Science” this time in Appleton’s *Popular Science Monthly*. The first two of
them, “The Fixation of Belief” and “How to Make Our Ideas Clear”, are commonly taken
to be based upon a nameless paper read by Peirce before the Metaphysical Club in Novem-
ber 1872, just about the time Peirce’s Kantism “got whittled down to small dimensions”
(MS 317). Moreover, “The Fixation of Belief”, apart from the fact that it includes prelimi-
ary notes to what in the next article of the series would appear as the maxim of pragmat-
ism, is also very remarkable on account of its composition. Namely, as in the case of the
Kantian transition from the 1st Critique to the 2nd, it presents the argument that seems to
give consistent pragmatic reinterpretation of all the logical steps made by Peirce in his
“New List” ten years earlier.

Peirce’s “New List” rests on the assumption that there’s a logical space, or, rather, logi-
cally significant distance between being and substance, i.e., the conceptual space to be
filled in order to make sense of the question “what is … this?”. This logically significant
distance is covered by a set of consecutive media – quality, relation, and representation –
that are needed to get the process of interpretation started. To summarize the discussed
above, an interpretant, the last general term in the sequence, performs several crucial inter-
connected functions: (1) it makes us conceive the impressions together as *being ours* and,
thereby (2) allows us to grasp the multitude of impressions in a totality of a concept. Fur-
ther, (3) it addresses a given expression to its further interpretation, thus (4) justifying the
continuity of interpretation. Finally, unlike the preceding two, (5) it does not add any con-
cept to the multitude of impressions, but unites the manifold directly. Thus, the notion of
interpretant embodied Peirce’s early semiotic intuitions, namely, his first elaborate juxtapo-
sition of the notions of continuity and generality, along with the idea of any expression ad-
dressed to future interpretations conceived as *ours*. These early intuitions inspired by Kan-
tian table of categories proved to be of crucial importance in the developments of Peirce’s
theory which followed immediately after his “New List”. In particular, the intricate and ex-
tremely rich conceptual amalgam brought forth by Peirce in his notion of interpretant al-
ready contained the germ of his regulative idea of a community of inquirers, the regulative
future us which any interpretation guided by the right method is inevitably aimed at – the idea which was introduced by Peirce in his 1868 paper “Some Consequences of Four Inca-pacities” a year after Peirce presented his “New List” to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences (see also Apel 1980: ch. III).

Back to Peirce’s “Illustrations”, it is our abduction that “The Fixation of Belief”, the first paper in the series, may be understood in a manner similar to that of “New List”, namely, as resting on the assumption that there is a practically significant distance between “believing something” and “believing something that would be true in the long run”. This practical distance can only be passed by fixing our belief in one way or another. So, like in the case of Kantian “pragmatic belief”, the difference has degrees. The role of consecutive media here is played by four different methods, those of tenacity, authority, a priori, and practical science that are needed to make this distance epistemologically irrelevant.

Now there’s no direct indication to such a distinction in the text of the paper. Moreover, in the very beginning of “The Fixation of Belief”, before setting about to describe the methods Peirce makes an important stipulation, namely, that fixing beliefs does not presuppose any epistemologically legitimate difference between “believing something” and “believing something is true”:

The irritation of doubt is the only immediate motive for the struggle to attain belief. It is certainly best for us that our beliefs should be such as may truly guide our actions so as to satisfy our desires; and this reflection will make us reject every belief which does not seem to have been so formed as to insure this result. But it will only do so by creating a doubt in the place of that belief. With the doubt, therefore, the struggle begins, and with the cessation of doubt it ends. Hence, the sole object of inquiry is the settlement of opinion. We may fancy that this is not enough for us, and that we seek, not merely an opinion, but a true opinion. But put this fancy to the test, and it proves groundless; for as soon as a firm belief is reached we are entirely satisfied, whether the belief be true or false. … The most that can be maintained is, that we seek for a belief that we shall think to be true. But we think each one of our beliefs to be true, and, indeed, it is mere tautology to say so (W3: 1872-1878, 247-248).

Meanwhile, in spite of the pronounced tautology, by the end of the paper Peirce characterizes the scientific method as “the only one of the four methods which presents any distinction of a right and a wrong way” (W3: 1872-1878, 254; emphasis added). Thus, on the one hand, it seems redundant to assert the truth of one’s belief as far as it successfully guides his actions so as to satisfy his desires. And as far as there are different sorts of social practices that yield appropriate methods of reaching firm beliefs, one may choose the method which would bring the satisfaction. On the other hand, the method of science, unlike the other three, is able to present a “distinction of a right and a wrong way”. There must be, then, a solid criterion which makes the method of science more preferable in this respect. The criterion is this:

To satisfy our doubts, therefore, it is necessary that a method should be found by which our beliefs may be determined by nothing human, but by some external permanency – by something upon which our thinking has no effect. … Our external permanency would not be external, in our sense, if it was restricted in its influence to one individual. It must be something which affects, or might affect, every man. And, though these affections are necessarily as various as are individual conditions, yet the method must be such that the ultimate conclusion of every man shall be the same (W3: 1872-1878, 253).
It has been admitted that Peirce’s use of the word “external” in this passage is ambiguous: Peirce refers to “real things whose characters are entirely independent of our opinions about them” (W3: 1872-1878, 254), but at first does not give any clear arguments as to whether those things shall be considered as anything different from Kantian-like things-in-themselves (Short 2007: 46-48). Moreover, Peirce’s notion of external permanency as “something upon which our thinking has no effect” may be read as a terminological allusion to the concept of “something permanent” (etwas Beharrliches) which occurs in the end of Kant’s “Analytic of Principles”. Kant needs it for the refutation of Descartes’ problem-atic idealism according to which the reality of things outside me is ultimately indemonstrable, the only ultimately irrevocable claim being that “I am”. Kant uses this concept to show that, as far as there’s nothing permanent in self-perception (I always think of myself as a subject, while I can experience myself only as an immanent object) the very continuity of experience, as well as my inner experience as such are necessarily bound up with the existence of some sort of external permanency (KRV: B 275-276).

What does “external” mean in this case? The meaning of the word is clarified later in “How to Make our Ideas Clear”, the next paper in the series:

Different minds may set out with the most antagonistic views, but the progress of investigation carries them by a force outside of themselves to one and the same conclusion. This activity of thought by which we are carried, not where we wish, but to a foreordained goal, is like the operation of destiny. … The opinion which is fated to be ultimately agreed to by all who investigate, is what we mean by the truth, and the object represented in this opinion is the real (W3: 1872-1878, 273).

Thus, the truth of a belief now receives a special definition which is absent in the case of the other methods. Namely, it is now defined as the ultimate agreement of “all who investigate”. Moreover, in the case of scientific method, Peirce lays special stress on the fixation as a result of a progressive process carried out by some force outside individual minds.

Further, right after the quoted passage Peirce explains how the idea of such force is to be brought into compliance with his earlier “formal” definition of reality as independent from what is ultimately thought of about it:

… reality is independent, not necessarily of thought in general, but only of what you or I or any finite number of men may think about it; and … though the object of the final opinion depends on what that opinion is, yet what that opinion is does not depend on what you or I or any man thinks. … Our perversity and that of others may indefinitely postpone the settlement of opinion… Yet even that would not change the nature of the belief, which alone could be the result of investigation carried sufficiently far… (W3: 1872-1878, 273).

In “New List”, although all three categories are necessary steps in the process of deduction, the true connection between the continuity of thought and generality of a concept is revealed only in the reference to an interpretant. Likewise, in “The Fixation of Belief”, each method of fixing beliefs is a necessary step in understanding the advantages of scientific inquiry. It is only the reference to the scientific method that shows the way to formation of general opinions we are fated to obtain in the long run – provided our investigation according to this method is carried sufficiently far. While in the first three methods the truth of a belief does not involve the ultimate agreement of “all who investigate”, and the dependence of things beliefs are about on what the beliefs are is taken uncritically, it is only the proper use of the fourth method of fixing beliefs that makes this dependence to be a matter of fact,
thus representing truth and reality as coordinate concepts – with their practical synthesis gradually achieved in the process of inquiry. So, what we allegedly have here is a practical synthesis analogous to the logical one displayed in the “New List”. Now let us turn to the structural concordance between “On a New List of Categories” and “The Fixation of Belief” in some further detail.

The method of tenacity is applied when a man holds a self-satisfied opinion so that “the pleasure he derives from his calm faith overbalances any inconveniences resulting from its deceptive character” (W3: 1872-1878, 249). At this first step any belief is nothing more than a quality in itself. For, like a self-satisfied and self-contained opinion held by an individual, a quality, which Peirce himself compared with the Kantian “manifold in intuition”, or, with reservations, with Hegelian “sense-certainty” (Stern 2005: 67) is,

…an instance of that kind of consciousness which involves no analysis, comparison or any process whatsoever, nor consists in whole or in part of any act by which one stretch of consciousness is distinguished from another, which has its own positive quality which consists in nothing else, and which is of itself all that it is, however it may have been brought about; so that if this feeling is present during a lapse of time, it is wholly and equally present at every moment of that time. To reduce this description to a simple definition, I will say that by a feeling I mean an instance of that sort of element of consciousness which is all that it is positively, in itself, regardless of anything else (CP 1.306).

Tenacity, intellectual inelasticity is a feature of any individual mind as far as it is considered as it is in itself “regardless of anything else” and presupposing no distinction or comparison; it amounts to an immediate experience of a self-satisfactory feeling of assurance, a kind of Hegelian die sinnliche Gewissheit, a naïve and immediate unity of subject and object, an abstraction of “here and now”.

The second method represents an opinion enforced by certain authority, be it an individual or some sort of institution. Here belief is in the form of action-reaction or, in Hegelian terms, “negative unity”, and is therefore of relational character:

This conception, that another man’s thought or sentiment may be equivalent to one’s own, is a distinctly new step, and a highly important one. It arises from an impulse too strong in man to be suppressed, without danger of destroying the human species. Unless we make ourselves hermits, we shall necessarily influence each other’s opinions (W3: 1872-1878, 250).

So it appears that the collision between the social and a blind tenacity in following some belief gives rise to a first objectified form of rationality for an individual – an idea of a law as a general expression for a set of opinions held by a certain social group “here and now”. Here opinion cannot be considered in itself anymore and is confronted by another opinion with which it enters in a certain relation. The immediacy of tenacity is replaced by a direct experience of the other.

However, sooner or later in any given society, Peirce says, “some individuals will be found who … possess a wider sort of social feeling” (W3: 1872-1878, 252; emphasis added). This wider social feeling allows them to see most of such laws as historical accidents, products of mere social design or public opinion manipulation. They propose the new a priori method which excludes the possibility for a belief to depend on the idiosyncratic whim of an individual or a law-like power of society: it predetermines the choice of opinion
bringing it, as philosophers of a priori themselves believe, into harmony with natural causes.

Indeed, every man, according to Peirce, is a truth-seeker by nature – simply because, even in the absence of clearly stated reasons, at every moment of his life he cannot help making a choice. And in doing so, he inevitably changes the natural balance of probabilities. Science in its pragmatist understanding, as the source of the next and final method in the list, is nothing other than an extension of this natural disposition, or a more logically complex and sophisticated expression of it. Naturally, anybody may accept false premises and come to false conclusions. Science does not offer a way to get rid of this problem in any given “here and now”, but merely offers a mode of action, a method which ascribes practical meaning to our natural inclination towards making right decisions.

The method of science is seen by Peirce as a correction of the a priori method by applying it to experience, so they together may be taken to form the third and last step in the process. In the use of scientific method reality is no longer determined by individual will, social contract, or a priori rules. Moreover, compared with the other three this method has one feature that is peculiar to it. It is such that any decision made on the basis of its logic is immediately connected with an ethical choice. For Peirce, it is by following this method that logic reveals itself as the ethics of intellect, and ethics as the logic of conduct.

Thus, in Peirce’s “New List”, the interpretant brings the multitude of impressions to unity because, unlike quality and relation, it does not add any new concept to the multitude, but simply allows us to grasp the impressions as ours. Likewise, the method of science is a final step in coordinating “believing something” with “believing something that would be true in the long run” because, unlike other methods, it makes an opinion independent of any considerations that rely upon personal advantages or disadvantages of holding it. Otherwise, a person who, in using the scientific method, confesses that there is such a thing as truth, which is distinguished from falsehood simply by this, that if acted on it should, on full consideration, carry us to the point we aim at and not astray, and then, though convinced of this, dares not know the truth and seeks to avoid it, is in a sorry state of mind indeed. (W3: 1872-1878, 257)

An interpretant unites my diverse impressions not by joining any other concept to the diversity, but by appealing to its further interpretation by another interpretant. Likewise, in Peirce’s maxim certain conceivable practical results of actions and perceptions are united into a concept, where “the test of whether I am truly following the method is not an immediate appeal to my feelings and purposes, but, on the contrary, itself involves the application of the method” (W3: 1872-1878, 255).

Peirce thus deliberately preserves the structure of Kantian argumentation which shows structural unity of logical and practical problems, while filling the aforementioned gaps in Kant’s theory. From 1867, the year of “On a New List of Categories”, to 1877, the year of “The Fixation of Belief”, Peirce makes an important move similar to that which Kant made from the 1st Critique to the 2nd.

In making this conclusion, we by no means wish to suggest that “The Fixation of Belief” contains any sort of ethical doctrine. On the contrary, in concluding paragraphs of it Peirce concedes that the first three methods of fixing beliefs have their merits and advantages and he is careful enough not to claim unquestionable ethical superiority of scientific method over them: practical consequences are not necessarily moral ones (W3: 1872-1878, 255-257). However, it is perfectly justifiable to say that it is this paper that displays Peirce’s decisive move from questions of logical representation to those of practical agency. And it is quite remarkable that this move was marked by the compositional symmetry between
Peirce’s solutions in the two papers in question, which symmetry has its analogy in Kant’s critical arguments.

If the foregoing analysis is correct, it offers a plausible answer to the question of why the early Peirce, an admirer of Kant, reformulates Kant’s view on the relationship between logic and ethics without any reference to aesthetic judgment. Kant represents the logical and the ethical sides of his architectonics as a static self-positing. In case of pure reason, the schematism of the understanding is described as “an art concealed in the depths of the human soul”; in case of practical reason, there’s a problem of how, taken as a general faculty, it gives determinate answers as to what to do in concrete situations, if all it can offer is the universal law grounded in the purely formal foundation of will. As a result, the gap between the theoretical and the practical is bridged by aesthetic judgment. Peirce reinterprets Kantian syntheses as processes of continuous development, which makes it possible for the theoretical and the practical to be consistently interpreted into one another without the resort to aesthetic mediation. He incorporates aesthetics only much later, in order to provide a missing link between his normative theory, his evolutionary metaphysics, and his doctrine of categories. Thus, it appears that Peirce ignored aesthetics at the early period of his career when Kantian influence on his thought was very strong. And vice versa, he finally acknowledged the role of aesthetics and laid the decisive emphasis on the Kantian idea of architectonics, with the problem of normativity as its starting point, at the time when, as he himself claims, he was as far from Kant as he possibly could.

As it has already been mentioned above, Peirce’s move from logical representation to practical agency happened during the few years prior to the founding of the Metaphysical Club in Cambridge and shortly after Peirce attended Wright’s lectures on the psychology of Alexander Bain at Harvard, during which Wright gave an account of Bain’s famous definition of belief. Max H. Fisch specifies this Peirce’s move, starting from Peirce’s 1868 Journal of Speculative Philosophy series, as a transition from “the pre-Bain theory” to “the post-Bain theory”:

It is evident that Peirce was already acquainted with Bain’s theory of belief in 1868 … but he neither develops nor applies it, and there is no trace of pragmatism. On the other hand, the most conspicuous doctrine of the pre-Bain theory, that all thought is in signs, is not asserted in the post-Bain theory; but it is assumed throughout. … There is, however, a crucial difference between the two theories at this point. According to the pre-Bain theory, every thought interprets a previous thought and is interpreted by a subsequent thought; that is, every sign translates another and is in turn translated by still another. According to the post-Bain theory, the cognitive process has context, direction and purpose. Thought arises in one set of circumstances and terminates in another. It starts from a doubt and ends in a belief, the essence of which is a habit or rule of action. In the pre-Bain theory, thought is identified with cognition; in the post-Bain theory, it is identified with inquiry. In place of the continuity and ubiquity of the cognitive ‘process, we have the analysis of the cyclic belief-doubt-inquiry-belief continuum which is Peirce’s restatement of Bain’s doctrine of belief, and it is out of this analysis that the pragmatic maxim is drawn (Fisch 1986: 97-98).

According to Fisch, these differences and similarities raise the question of whether Peirce himself drew any clear distinction between the two theories and how exactly the transition took place, given that:

In the course in logic which Peirce taught at the John Hopkins University in the years immediately following the publication of his Popular Science Monthly series, he began
with the topic, “The Psychological and Metaphysical facts upon which the possibility of Logic rests”, and the texts for this topic were the three *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* articles developing his pre-Bain theory of cognition, and the first two of the *Popular Science Monthly* articles developing his post-Bain theory (Fisch 1986: 100).

As to the second part of the question (how exactly the transition took place), again, if the foregoing analysis is correct, Peirce chose a sophisticated compositional decision, which provided a continuous link between the theoretical and the practical, leaving aesthetics, as the third, meditational element out of the picture. Of course, he also might well realize that the binary character is revealed in aesthetic judgment itself. The intriguing fact is that this was, although in a vague and undeveloped form, already anticipated by Peirce at the time he read Schiller’s *Aesthetische Briefe* in 1857:

> Now it will be observed that beauty gives the mind no particular direction or tendency – hence it can have no result either for the intellect or the will, and can help us to perform no single duty. On the other hand, it places the mind in a state of “infinite determinable-ness” so that it can turn in any direction and is in perfect freedom; hence, beauty is in the highest degree fruitful with respect to knowledge and morality (W1: 1857-1866, 11-12).

However, although later on Peirce carefully remastered the role aesthetic judgment played in Kant’s theory and incorporated it in his own architectonics, his pragmatism in its first formulation provided the means for an important shift. It played a major part in deconstructing the classical picture of relations between three normative sciences and introduced a significant change into Kantian aesthetics-based symbolism.

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Giovanni Tuzet

Legal Judgment as a Philosophical Archetype: A Pragmatist Analysis of Three Theses*

Abstract. The article addresses three theses on judgment in general and legal judgment in particular, starting from Peirce’s and Dewey’s claims about them. The first thesis, ontological, concerns the content of an act of judgment and says that judgment is about an object instantiating a property (not about a property instantiated by an object). The second, alethic, concerns the relation between judgment and truth and says that judgment is the attribution of a truth value to a proposition. The third, genetic, deals with the moments of judgment claiming it is a process susceptible of being articulated in such moments. Its fundamental moments are 1) hypothesis, 2) inquiry, 3) result. The article claims that the three theses interconnect and hold for both judgment in general and legal judgment, given that the latter is a model of the former; so a complex conception of judgment is articulated, discussing also its relations with assertion and inference.

Le jugement doit être rigoureusement caractérisé dans son existence.

P. Valéry

In 1938, in his book Logic: the Theory of Inquiry, John Dewey (1859-1952) established legal judgment as a model for the understanding of judgment in general. The aim of this paper is to consider three theses applying to legal judgment and see if they can also apply to judgment in general. Should that be the case, then Dewey’s idea would be confirmed (at least with relation to such theses); should it not be the case, Dewey’s idea would be falsified.

By “legal judgment” we shall mean the verdict deciding a legal case (including the factual and normative reasons for making it). Then, from a philosophical point of view, the three theses will be discussed with reference to some ideas by Charles S. Peirce (1839-1914) and within a pragmatist framework, insofar as Dewey embraced it. More specifically, this paper will focus on Peirce’s theory of inference, scientific method, judgment and assertion. Our conclusion on Dewey’s hypothesis will be an affirmative one and, finally, a complex conception of judgment, accounting for both its social and psychological dimensions, will be suggested.

On the topic of judgment we must first register a prolonged and widespread philosophical silence; indeed, it is undeniable that judgment plays a marginal role in the philosophy of the 20th century. However, because of its indisputable relevance for both a philosophical

* The author wishes to thank two anonymous referees of this journal for their helpful comments and suggestions on a previous version of this work.

1 See however Russell’s theory of judgment in the first half of the century, discussed by Wittgenstein and Ramsey among others (cf. Russell 1910: 147-159, Ramsey 1927-1929), and see Husserl’s later thoughts (1939).
and a juridical point of view, we propose to address the subject from both perspectives, in
the hope that the merits of the one will not be annulled by the shortcomings of the other.

To start with, a distinction should be made between the following three different conceptions of judgment:

(A) Judgment as a mental act attributing a predicate to a subject
(B) Judgment as an act of assent to a proposition
(C) Judgment as a process leading to a proposition.

The first is, broadly speaking, the traditional conception that can be found in Peirce’s early thoughts; the second one is expounded in his later writings and, in a sense, by Frege too; the third one is considered, among others, by Dewey. The three theses will be based on these three conceptions. The purpose of a judgment is to determine the connotation of a subject or, in other words, to describe a given entity: this is (A), the ontological thesis. Judgment approves the formed proposition, acknowledging it as true: this is (B), the alethic thesis. The proposition is not formed immediately, it develops through a process: this is (C), what will be called genetic thesis. The first two concern, so to speak, the nature of judgment, while the third pertains to its dynamics.

Now, it needs to be established whether these theses truly apply to legal judgment and whether they can contribute to an understanding of judgment in general. If that were the case, Dewey’s hypothesis would be confirmed. Yet, a number of philosophical issues need to be addressed before answering these questions.

It should first be acknowledged that the three conceptions and the relative theses are not in contradiction with one another. In fact, it can be argued that their conjunction actually accounts for what a judgment is. Additionally, their conjunction also accounts for two interesting relations: the one between judgment and inference and the other between judgment and assertion.

As to the relation between judgment and inference, judgment in the sense of (A), though fundamental from a conceptual point of view, does not account for the inferential, normative and social dimensions of judgment and of legal judgment in particular. Per se, (A) does not require making explicit the inferences underlying a judgment and justifying it. Conversely, with respect to legal judgment, the rule of law requires judges to make explicit what reasons and inferences justify in their view a decision (i.e. the various factual and normative considerations from which judgment is derived through argumentation). In this sense the first conception of judgment is too narrow to account for both the intersubjective practices underlying judgment (at least in the judicial arena) and the social practices where the premises of judgment need to be clarified to ensure their controllability and the judger’s responsibility. The very concept of responsibility, in particular, calls for a recognition of the social dimension judgment is involved in. The same applies to conception (B), which must be integrated with an account of the process forming the proposition being judged. It would seem therefore that only a thesis based on conception (C) is capable of accounting for all this complex dynamics, although it is not yet proven that a genetic thesis can account for the normative dimension of judgment. It may very well be that certain aspects investigated by (C) belong to a level which is very different from that of a normative theory of judgment and of the logical constraints raised by (A) and (B). On the other hand, that would substantiate that it is the conjunction of the three theses that accounts for judgment as a whole and for the relation between judgment and inference. To put it differently, only the conjunction
of the three provides a full understanding of judgment, given that (A) and (B) do not take into account the ways in which judgment is formed.

As for the relation between judgment and assertion, there is clearly the need for a broad conception of judgment, of the (C) type, in order to account for the responsibility implied by an assertion. According to many authors, Peirce included, proposition and belief are not acts. On the contrary judgment and assertion belong to the category of acts, the difference between them being that the former is, so to speak, an internal act, while the latter is an external one. We will try to show that this characterization does not sufficiently consider judgments in their public form and does not account for the responsibility of assertion. From the genetic viewpoint, we shall suggest a conception of judgment articulating it in three key and logically distinct stages: hypothesis, inquiry, and result. In a certain way, this articulation is a translation of the nature of legal judgment as a process, where the formation of the subject-matter is followed by a testing stage and finally by decision. Moreover, this is the development of a metaphor put forward by Peirce in 1908 (CP 5.546): judgment is a ripening process. Clearly, it is only the evaluation of the process preceding it that makes it possible to assess the responsibility of an assertion. In fact, this way of characterizing (C) is compatible with the logical constraints implied by (A) and (B). Consequently, the conjunction of the three theses and conceptions appears to have the further capacity of accounting for the relation between judgment and assertion too.

However, before dealing with their consequences and implications (which look promising so far), it needs to be established whether the three theses are actually true of legal judgment and of judgment in general as well.

The Ontological Thesis

The ontological thesis is about the content of a judgment act. In a certain sense judgment is the attribution of a predicate to a subject (rather than of a subject to a predicate). In other words, judgment determines the connotation of a subject rather than the denotation of a predicate. Albeit almost irrelevant from a logical perspective, the difference in emphasis is quite relevant to a theory of judgment. From an ontological perspective, judgment is about an object with a certain attribute, not about an attribute exemplified by a certain object. (In semiotic terms, this is an indexical thesis on judgment). Judgment is about something specific, hic et nunc. Peirce conceives of judgment as a mental act by a subject who realizes to have a certain belief, but he also states (chiefly in his early writings, around 1870) that the content of belief consists, in propositional terms, in a predicate associated to a subject, and, in semiotic terms (as he claims around 1885) in an icon associated to an index. The indexical dimension consists in the fact that the object of judgment can be indicated and shown. The ontological thesis (OT) can therefore be formulated as follows:

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2. “What is the essence of a Judgment? A judgment is the mental act by which the judge seeks to impress upon himself the truth of the proposition. It is much the same as an act of asserting the proposition, or going before a notary and assuming formal responsibility for its truth, except that those acts are intended to affect others, while the judgment is only intended to affect oneself” (CP 2.252). Cf. W4: 164, CP 2.309, CP 8.115, CP 8.337, NEM 4: 39.


4. “This act which amounts to such a resolve, is a peculiar act of the will whereby we cause an image, or icon, to be associated, in a particular strenuous way, with an object represented to us by an index. This act itself is represented in the proposition by a symbol, and the consciousness of it fulfills the function of a symbol in the
(OT) Judgment attributes a property to an object of judgment

(where “attributes” is to be understood broadly, as including both the ascription and the acknowledgment of a property).

This thesis is certainly true of legal judgment, which does not follow (at least not directly) from a question like

(i) Which subjects exemplify the liability for a theft?

but rather from a question like

(ii) Is Narses liable for this theft?

The purport of OT is lessened by the fact that our judgments are usually related to entities of which we already know certain aspects and must determine an additional property. In these instances the object of judgment is not completely devoid of connotation – on the contrary, all is known about it determines its connotation (or better, determines the connotation of the term designating such object). This observation, however, does not undermine the heart of OT in any way, that is to say the thesis whereby every judgment is matched by an object of judgment with reference to which a property must be determined.

But the following objection might be raised: some types of judgment do not possess an indexical dimension. If certain legal judgments like

(a) Narses is liable for this theft
(b) Narses is not liable for this theft

possess a clear-cut indexical dimension, others do not. For instance, moral judgments like

(c) Slavery is bad

draw their strength from their generality. They attribute a predicate to a subject without being indexical judgments. The indexical thesis does not apply to them. OT instead seems to do so if we admit that not only specific entities (the theft involving Narses) but also general entities (slavery) may constitute the object of a judgment. Of course, the type of entity needs to be specified, but it can be admitted that such entities require some form of reality for the moral judgment associated to them not to be totally meaningless. On the other hand, in addition to such non-indexical moral judgments, there are examples of judgments that are both moral and indexical, for instance

Dancy’s moral particularism (1993) could be easily harmonized with OT, but the question remains whether or not it is a satisfactory theory of moral judgments. See also Putnam (2004: 26-27) commenting on Levinas’s moral philosophy: “Levinas’s thought experiment is always to imagine myself confronted with one single suffering human being, ignoring for the moment the likelihood that I am already under obligation to many other human beings. I am supposed to feel the obligation to help this human being, an obligation which I am to experience not as the obligation to obey a principle, as a Kantian would, but as an obligation to that human being.”
(d) Theodore is generous.

Here OT also applies in its indexical dimension. But this implies a further and even stronger objection to OT: if the object of judgment is an entity whatsoever (general or particular, abstract or concrete), OT looses much of its interest as a thesis. It runs the risk of turning into the tautology whereby every proposition has a subject. Let’s consider esthetic judgments like

(e) *Le bateau ivre* is the most beautiful poem by Rimbaud
(f) *I tre filosofi* by Giorgione is an amazing painting

or a political judgment like

(g) The relations between North Korea and South Korea are very difficult.

Can it be argued that (e)-(g) judgments concern an object of judgment to the same extent as (a) or (d)? Can we argue that the same ontological thesis applies to (a)-(g) judgments, i.e. that every judgment qualifies an object of judgment? Yes, in a trivial sense it seems to depend on the linguistic structure of judgments; but if we want OT to be interesting, then we must specify the type of object we are dealing with. One may plausibly state that it relates to a variety of entities – some individuals in (a) and (d), a universal in (c), some works of art in (e) and (f), and some institutional entities in (g) – but the question remains whether this thesis is truly an ontological one, namely a thesis about really existing things. Here the alternative runs the risk of being the following one: saying that OT, at least in the formulation herein, applies to judgment in general is tantamount to uttering either a platitude or something false.

**The Alethic Thesis**

Insofar as judicial decisions aim to be just, they have to be based on *true* premises. As Susan Haack has recently put it (2007: 14), “factual truth is an essential element of substantive justice; it really matters that the person who is punished be the person who actually committed the crime or caused the injury.” Truth is a necessary condition of justice and legal judgments claim to be true. So the ontological thesis ties on a second thesis about the relation between judgment and truth. It may be called *alethic*. This thesis considers judgment as the *attribution of a truth value to a proposition*. In this sense judgment is expressed by assertions like

(a) Narses is liable for this theft.

We have called ontological the aspect of judgment whereby an entity designated by a propositional subject receives its connotation through a predicate. Concept predication is capable of being either true or false and it is for this reason that we call it alethic thesis. As

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6 If then one might go as far as to argue that non-indexical moral judgments stem from a generalization starting from specific instances, non-indexical moral judgments would rest all the same on an indexical basis. A similar relation applies between the judgments of the lower and higher courts in the legal domain. Cf. Twining (1991: 336) on the importance of concrete cases in a common law perspective.

Peirce argued in 1908, judgment is the effort to attain the acquisition of a truth, since in judging that (a), for instance, the formed proposition is deemed true and approved as such, accepting the various consequences thereof, including those related to conduct and responsibility:

even in solitary meditation every judgment is an effort to press home, upon the self of the immediate future and of the general future, some truth. It is a genuine assertion, just as the vernacular phrase represents it; and solitary dialectic is still of the nature of dialogue. Consequently it must be equally true that here too there is contained an element of assuming responsibility, of “taking the consequences” (CP 5.546).

Such an “effort” arises from a conjectural predication seeking confirmation or disproval. It should be noted that, in Peirce’s view, a concept constitutive of a proposition makes its appearance in the judgment before the proposition is approved: “the concept makes its appearance before the judgment is ripe, when it is still in the problematic or interrogatory mood” (CP 5.547).

The concept is initially predicated “in the problematic or interrogatory mood” and only at a later stage, if the initial conjecture is confirmed, it may become the content of a justified assertion. This dynamic process starts therefore with a conjectural stage, followed by an inquiry (mental or empirical, depending on the circumstances) and ends with a result susceptible of being the content of an assertion. These observations provide sufficient ground to consider a third thesis on the process of judgment, but before coming to it, the significance and terms of this second thesis must be further specified.

The alethic thesis definitely applies to legal judgment that aims at establishing the truth of (a) or (b), and equally to judgments like (c)-(g) implying a claim of truth regarding their content. It can be argued that every judgment, regardless of the type, makes a claim of truth about its content and that the alethic thesis (AT) applies to any type of judgment, and consequently to judgment in general too. It may be reformulated as follows:

(AT) Judgment attributes a truth value to a proposition.

(where “attributes” is to be understood again in a broad sense, even though it alludes here to recognition or acknowledgment rather than to ascription).

As previously stated, OT and AT stem from two different philosophical conceptions of judgment, that can be articulated as follows. For (A) judgment is the attribution of a predicate to a subject. For (B) it is the attribution of a truth value to a proposition (or thought, or belief according to different philosophical standpoints). According to the former and more traditional conception, judgment consists in an association or separation of ideas. (Saying that it is a predicate associated with a subject makes it definitely more precise). The latter conception was expounded by Gottlob Frege (1848-1925). According to the German philosopher (1879: 52 ff.) judgment is the act through which the truth of a thought is recognized. The proposition “If Narses has committed a theft, then he must be punished” is not strictly speaking a judgment. Judging is the act of approving a proposition, or better, the act recognizing the truth value of the thought expressed by the proposition. Frege, however, takes it

8 On the other hand one may wonder what would the truth of (c) and (e) consist of. Are there any moral and esthetic truths? Are there any moral and esthetic facts making (c) and (e) true? Are (c) and (e), instead, expressions of feelings without any truth value? Are they norms, that is ought-judgments instead of is-judgments? One may very well contend, in any case, that there are propositions (true or false) describing moral or esthetic feelings (neither true or false) or describing norms (neither true or false).

Cf. in particular Arnauld and Nicole, La logique ou l’art de penser, II. In the contemporary debate cf. McDowell (1994).
a step further. Albeit he does not consider it literally a definition, in 1892 he writes that judgment can be regarded as an **advance** from a thought to its truth value\(^{10}\). In 1918-1919, in his *Thought: a Logical Investigation*, he draws a distinction between (1) the apprehension of a thought – thinking; (2) the recognition of the truth of a thought – judgment; (3) the manifestation of this thought – assertion\(^{11}\). Despite the important differences between the two philosophers (in metaphysics, in particular, Frege is a Platonist while Peirce is a Scotist), Frege’s distinctions somewhat resemble the dynamics hinted at by Peirce when he refers to an effort to acquire a truth capable of being asserted.

Moreover, these observations can be usefully compared with some of Dewey’s ideas. In 1912 he discriminates between a broad and a narrow sense of the term “judgment”.

This term is employed in a larger and more vital sense and in a narrower and more formal one. In its pregnant sense it means the act (or the power) of weighing facts or evidence, in order to reach a conclusion or decision; or (as is usual with words denoting acts) the result, the outcome of the process, the decision reached by the process of reflective inquiry and deliberation (MW 7: 262).

In its narrower and more technical sense a judgment is a statement of a relation between two objects, or between two contents of thought, two meanings (MW 7: 264).

Dewey’s narrow and formal sense of judgment resembles judgment in sense (A), and since (A) is the association of a predicate and a subject, it generates a judgment in sense (B), that is, an act of assent to a proposition. It should also be noted that judgment in its “broad and vital” sense overlaps with conception (C): on the one hand, as a process characterized by a plurality of moments and, on the other, as the conclusion of the process. (Dewey will come back to these thoughts in 1938). As the genetic thesis will exemplify, this can be articulated as follows: it is a process starting with a hypothesis on the object of judgment, which continues through a proper investigation and ends with the settlement of what is true about the object of judgment and the consequences of it\(^{12}\).

To sum up, Frege refers to an **advance**; Pierce suggests to use the word **effort**; Dewey talks about a **vital** sense of judgment. These are different metaphors by different philosophers. Nonetheless, they show that judgment is not something that one gets in one shot, so to speak; it is a complex phenomenon and is formed by a process\(^{13}\).

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**The Genetic Thesis**

There is still a third perspective. Insofar as judicial decisions are not made in one shot, so to say, but follow some procedures, legal judgments are structured in different temporal and functional parts (like the forming of a hypothesis, the testing of it, a decision on it)\(^{14}\). This is also true of judgment in general.

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\(^{10}\) Frege (1892: 159): “Judgements can be regarded as advances from a thought to a truth-value. Naturally this cannot be a definition. Judgement is something quite peculiar and incomparable.”

\(^{11}\) Frege (1918-1919: 329). In his second logical investigation (*Negation*), compare the distinction between (1) grasping a thought, and (2) judging: we can grasp the meaning of an interrogative sentence without knowing its truth value (Frege 1918-1919: 347-348). Cf. Bell (1979), Picardi (1997) and Tuzet (2006).

\(^{12}\) “In this sense judgment expresses the very heart of thinking. All thinking is, directly or indirectly, a part of the act of judging, of forming an estimate or valuation after investigation and testing” (MW 7: 262).

But see Ramsey (1927-1929: 46), who conceives of judging as including any form of “thinking that” independently of the way it is arrived at.

\(^{13}\) See e.g. Dumaitka (1986). Such parts, while often informal and unreflected in ordinary judgments, are normatively determined in legal judgments structured according to certain procedures.
Judgment can be observed in its various moments (or stages, if we consider a complex judging practice like the legal one). We shall call this third perspective genetic thesis. It accounts for the temporal and reflexive dimension of judgment, as well for its components: conjecture, observation and evaluation. Here is a general formulation of this thesis:

(GT) Judgment is a process whose result is the attribution of a truth value.

OT and AT concern the nature of judgment (what a judgment is); GT is about its dynamics (how a judgment is formed). GT aims at providing a theoretical articulation of the “ripening” process of judgment. It is a logical and psychological process, with some cognitive and inferential components and, if required by the hypothesis, an empirical dimension.

According to Peirce, judgment is something ripening in the mind, it is an effort for the acquisition of truth (CP 5.546) or, in other words, an effort for the determination of a belief, with the warning that, in the event of it proving false, it would entail negative consequences for the agent applying it in his conduct. In my opinion, judgment as a ripening process may be articulated in three fundamental moments: hypothesis, inquiry, result. The “non-ripe judgment”, where the concept is present “in the problematic or interrogatory mood”, corresponds to the moment of hypothesis. The “ripe judgment” corresponds to the result of the inquiry. The “effort” through which the truth of the hypothesis is checked, corresponds to the inquiry (cf. CP 5.547). In summary:

1) the hypothesis attributes a property to an object of judgment in a provisional way;
2) the inquiry evaluates the hypothesis;
3) the result attributes a truth value to the hypothesis evaluated by means of the inquiry.

GT may also result from the application, to the judgment-forming process, of the logic of scientific inquiry expounded by Peirce in 1877 and then modulated in inferential terms after 1900. The genetic thesis, however, is mainly related to Dewey’s considerations on the relation between judgment in general and legal judgment. In Dewey’s Logic: the Theory of Inquiry (1938), as we said at the beginning, legal judgment is a model for the understanding of judgment in general. Legal judgment is defined by the three following aspects, deemed of fundamental importance by Dewey (LW 12: 123-125):

1) there is an initial uncertainty and a dispute on what has taken place or on its meaning;
2) the dispute is settled through an inquiry and evaluation of the elements produced by the parties involved: evidence is produced about the relevant facts together with the relevant conceptual considerations, rules and principles which are in force in the legal system;

15 “A judgment is a mental act deliberately exercising a force tending to determine in the mind of the agent a belief in the proposition: to which should perhaps be added that the agent must be aware of his being liable to inconvenience in the event of the proposition’s proving false in any practical aspect” (NEM 4: 250).
17 “There is uncertainty and dispute about what shall be done because there is a conflict about the significance of what has taken place, even if there is agreement about what has taken place as a matter of fact – which, of course, is not always the case. The judicial settlement is a settlement of an issue because it decides existential conditions in their bearing upon further activities: the essence of the significance of any state of facts” (LW 12: 123-124). On Dewey’s theory of judgment cf. Frega (2006).
18 “On the one hand, propositions are advanced about the states of facts involved. Witnesses testify to what they have heard and seen; written records are offered, etc. This subject-matter is capable of direct observation and
3) the final judgment determines the legal consequences of the case. Dewey deems these features true of judgment in general. According to his third point, in fact, the final judgment determines the legal consequences of the factual qualification and reconstruction, whereas, to come back to our theses, according to the third moment of GT, judgment determines the truth of a proposition. There is undoubtedly a difference, but neither a tension nor a contradiction, since the propositional nature of the final judgment implies the consequences of the judged proposition (in compliance with the pragmatist principle of significance, enunciated by Peirce’s pragmatic maxim). The genetic thesis will be better appreciated once related to the other theses on judgment. As we saw, there is indeed a close connection between OT and AT on the one hand and the (A) and (B) conception of judgment on the other. According to conception (A), judgment is the attribution of a predicate to a subject. According to conception (B) it is the act of assent to the formed proposition. For OT judgment is the determination of the connotation of a propositional subject. For AT it is the attribution of a truth value to the formed proposition. How are these two theses articulated? They are articulated in the terms of GT and the (C) conception of judgment, i.e. the thesis referring to judgment as a ripening process, from an interrogatory and conjectural stage to a final assertive one, through an inquiry, be it empirical or mental, simple or complex, short or long, according to the object of judgment. Moreover, this way of specifying (C) complies with the logical constraints implied by (A) and (B).

It goes without saying that GT is valid for legal judgment. The question is whether it is equally valid for judgment in general. Does the dynamics highlighted by GT apply to all types of judgment? Or does it only apply to judgments needing an inquiry or a particularly complex reflection? With immediate judgments (for instance perceptual judgments), it would be plausible to consider GT as false. But Peirce argues that a perceptual judgment possesses an inferential character, despite the immediate, neither inferential nor propositional, character of a percept. In short, the genetic thesis does not apply to immediate judgments, but it is highly uncertain whether something of that kind exists beyond the most elementary perceptual judgments.

Furthermore, Peirce emphasizes that judgments are distinctive of beings endowed with self-control skills (cf. CP 5.115, 5.133, 5.533). As such, judging subjects are responsible for their own judgments. GT is particularly relevant in this respect: the possibility to elucidate the dynamics of judgment involves the possibility to elucidate the reasons of judgment (if this dynamics falls within the scope of self-control, of course). On what grounds has the truth of (a) or (b) been established? What evidence, what inquiry processes, what consideration has existential reference. As each party to the discussion produces its evidential material, the latter is intended to point to a determinate decision as a resolution of the as yet undetermined situation. The decision takes effect in a definite existential reconstruction" (LW 12: 124). 19

"On the other hand, there are propositions about conceptual subject-matter; rules of law are adduced to determine the admissibility (relevancy) and the weight of facts offered as evidence. The significance of factual material is fixed by the rules of the existing juridical system; it is not carried by the facts independent of the conceptual structure which interprets them. And yet, the quality of the problematic situation determines which rules of the total system are selected" (LW 12: 124). On Dewey, law and democracy cf. Talisse (2010) and Butler (2010).

"The final judgment arrived at is a settlement. The case is disposed of; the disposition takes effect in existential consequences. The sentence or proposition is not an end in itself but a decisive directive of future activities. [...] While prior propositions are means of instituting the sentence, the sentence is terminal as a means of instituting a definite existential situation" (LW 12: 124-125). On legal reasoning see among others MacCormick (1978), Aarno-MacCormick (1992), Wróblewski (1992), Tuzet (2010).

"Consider what effects, that might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then, our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object" (CP 5.402, 1878). Cf. CP 8.33 (1871); W3: 77, 108 (1873); CP 5.432, 5.438 (1905).

tions led to judging Narses guilty? On the contrary, immediate judgments do not imply any responsibility, if it is true that some judgments are formed outside the dimension of self-control. In this sense, GT can cover the normative aspects of judging.

Summing up: OT and AT account for the nature of judgment, GT accounts for its dynamic aspect (in compliance with the logical constraints implied by the two theses on the nature of judgment). According to OT, judging presupposes an object of judgment and the nature of judgment consists in the attribution of a certain property to the object. In a certain way, one might claim that every judgment is provoked by an object that requires a qualification.

This also reveals that judgment is founded, on the one hand, on the ontological status of the object and, on the other, on the cognitive and evaluative components of the qualification. According to AT, judgment consists in the attribution of a truth value to the proposition predicating a certain property of the object of judgment. Thus, OT and AT find a confirmation in the dynamic process pointed out by GT: the ontological thesis specifically concerns the first moment in the judging process, that is to say, the hypothetical attribution of a predicate to a subject, whereas the alethic thesis concerns the last moment, that is the determination of the truth value of the hypothesis.

Having said this, how can it be related to Dewey’s idea of legal judgment as a model of judgment in general? More specifically, how can Dewey’s hypothesis be confirmed with respect to the issues raised about OT? Let us consider the three theses once again:

(OT) Judgment attributes a property to an object of judgment
(AT) Judgment attributes a truth value to a proposition
(GT) Judgment is a process whose result is the attribution of a truth value.

Apparantly AT and GT do not raise any particular issues: AT is not in contradiction with Dewey’s idea and GT, in particular, meets with his theses on judgment. The problem remains with OT. We have already established that it is either trivial or wrong to say that OT – at least in the current formulation – applies to judgment in general; as a consequence, also Dewey’s hypothesis, at least with respect to this thesis, is equally trivial or wrong. On the other hand, at least for the purpose of a conceptual analysis – a trivial truth is preferable to a falsity: let us then take OT as a trivial truth (or, let us take it in the sense that from a logical point of view necessarily a judgment has a propositional subject that designates an object). It should be recalled at this point that it is the conjunction of the three theses that accounts for judgment. Then the question is: does the triviality of OT imply the triviality of the conjunction of the three theses? The answer is a negative one. Even if OT is trivially true of judgment in general, the conjunction of the three theses is not necessarily trivial. This is confirmed a posteriori if we consider the details and implications of AT and GT with relation to the ontological thesis.

Dewey’s hypothesis is thus confirmed and it can be concluded that the conjunction of the three theses holds true for judgment in general, and does so in a non trivial way. Indeed, this conjunction has some important consequences for a theory of judgment. For instance, it accounts for the relations between judgment, inference and assertion. These relations raise the more general question of the social and normative dimension of judgment and it is precisely on this that we would like to develop a final proposal.

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23 Is “confirmed” too strong a term here? I don’t think so, if Dewey’s hypothesis is found to be true.
The social dimension of judgment consists in the social character of its conceptual contents and in the public dimension of the assertion of its results. Following Wittgenstein (§ 580 of his *Philosophical Investigations*) it can be claimed that judgment is an “internal process” requiring “external criteria”. It might be added that the semantic conditions of this process are equally “external”: the semantic and conceptual content of our judgments is determined by the social practices determining the inferential role of the words and concepts we use. On an even more straightforward ground, one may observe that its social dimension is determined by the public dimension of the assertion of its results. Because of it having an eminently public character, legal judgment is thus a true model of judgment in general. There is no private law nor private legal judgment in the sense of secrete law or judgment, insofar as the law aims to rule the conduct of its addressees. Responsibility is associated to this character, on the account of its close relation with the assertive act.

The following question arises then: does assertion belong to the judgment process or not? If judgment in the (B) sense is the act attributing a truth value to judgment formed in the (A) sense, this does not imply the assertion of its content. However, if our assertions were completely separated from the rest, the assertion of a content, per se, irrespective of the process leading to it and its underlying reasons, would raise issues of responsibility very hard to evaluate. How to evaluate the responsibility of an assertion without knowing what process it originates from? There is agreement on one point – assertion is an act entailing responsibility with relation to the interlocutors of the speaker – but the question remains about the criteria to evaluate such a responsibility. An assertive act, in and of itself, is not sufficient for the purpose of that evaluation. Sure enough, in our practice, our evaluations are not limited to assertions only but embrace the processes leading or expected to lead to them.

Hence, with due consideration for the social dimension of our judgments, the suggestion is to consider assertion as part of the complex process of judging, and to evaluate its responsibilities with respect to this process. If assertion were separate from the other constitutive parts of judgment, its sense and consequences would be hard to establish. Assertion is the part of judgment that manifests the results of our inquiries or reflections and assumes responsibility for them. In summary, judgment in a complex sense may be articulated as follows:

\[(a)\] mental act attributing a predicate to a subject
\[(b)\] assenting to (the truth of) a predication
\[(c)\] asserting a predication.

These points articulate a complex conception of judgment, encompassing assertion. Following this conception, judgment consists of three fundamental acts (predication, assent, assertion) and epistemically speaking, of three fundamental moments (hypothesis, inquiry, result). This understanding makes it possible to account for its components, its logical constraints and finally its public dimension. The truth claims associated to the conclusions are thus justified and validated.

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This does not count as a denial of the psychological dimension of judgment. Judging starts with processes belonging to such a dimension (first of all, the formulation of a hypothesis). But the import of their contents would inevitably remain indeterminate for us if those processes and their results were not to be publicly manifested, compared and evaluated.

Abbreviations

CP

LW

MW

NEM

W

References


Book Review
Rosa M. Calcaterra (editor)

_**New Perspectives on Pragmatism and Analytic Philosophy**, Rodopi, Amsterdam-Ny York, 2001, by Anna Boncompagni

**Introduction and historical framework**

Pragmatism and analytic philosophy are two very complex and ramified schools of thought, two ways of conceiving the philosophical work, both of which extremely hard to define in a satisfactory and shared manner. For this reason, the attempt to make a study of their relations and interactions, encounters and clashes, may seem even more risky and uncertain. But _New Perspectives on Pragmatism and Analytic Philosophy_ (Rodopi, 2011), edited by Rosa Calcaterra, shows that on the opposite it is exactly through this comparison, built from different points of views, that we can gain a fresh and deep understanding of both of them. The volume offers an investigation that works on an historical and theoretical standpoint at once. It collects contributions by Vincent Colapietro, Mario De Caro, Rossella Fabbrichesi, Maurizio Ferraris, Nathan Houser, Ivo Assad Ibri, Giovanni Maddalena, Michele Marsonet, John McDowell and Eva Picardi, all of which show that the dialogue between the two schools has proven and proves to be surprisingly fruitful, not only in highlighting the main characteristics of the two interlocutors, but also in putting on the foreground new ways of conceiving traditional themes. It is indeed now almost impossible to catch the key features of neopragmatism without reference to the analytic tradition, and, on the other hand, it is almost impossible to understand the key features of post-positivist analytic philosophy without reference to the revival of some traditional pragmatist themes.

Rosa Calcaterra’s “Introduction” provides a useful framework which contextualizes the recent developments of research in the historical roots of the relation between classical pragmatism and analytic philosophy, both in the United States and in Europe. Pragmatism dominated the American academic scene until the arrival of the most prominent representatives of the Vienna Circle from Europe, who first interacted with, and later ousted the pragmatists from what was considered “serious” philosophical work, seeing them as lacking the necessary logical and epistemological rigor. In Europe, too, pragmatism had to face numerous critiques, and it almost disappeared during the establishment of the new currents of phenomenology, Marxism and hermeneutics. It was in the Sixties that in both contexts, US and Europe, pragmatism was revitalized, as it could easily become an allied of new perspectives centered on practical philosophy and concerned with the problems of action, fallibilism, and the relation between objectivity and intersubjectivity. What can be traced is a sort of double movement, aiming at the revision of the neo-empirist epistemological paradigm on the one hand, and at the reinstatement of the pragmatist method in the context of the contemporary world and philosophical debate, on the other. Calcaterra focuses on some key figures of what has been called the pragmatic turn in contemporary thought: Otto Apel and Jürgen Habermas, Hilary Putnam, Richard Rorty, Willard Quine, Wilfrid Sellars, Donald Davidson. Apel and Habermas’ pragmatic version of normativity is explicitly reminiscent of Peirce (mostly for Apel) and Mead (mostly for Habermas), and their shift from subjectivity to the new paradigm of intersubjectivity parallels the developments of the philosophy of ordinary language worked out by Austin and Searle, so that the linguistic turn and
the pragmatic turn can be read as two aspects of the same phenomenon. Putnam’s and Rorty’s different interpretations of pragmatism reflect two different ways of thinking about a crucial issue like truth: in Putnam’s view, it is a limiting concept that allows a progressive move towards factual reality, while in Rorty it is transferred into a hermeneutic and historicist context, that leads to the acknowledgment of the social, linguistic, cultural nature of reality itself. Quine, Sellars and Davidson, finally, can be read, as Calcaterra proposes, as not abandoning but reformulating realism, so that the interference between the logical and empirical dimension implies a concept of truth which cannot be reduced to sense-data, but entails a more sophisticated form of correspondentism, where naturalism and the criterion of intersubjectivity can interact. The search for new criterions for objectivity is probably one of the most important, but not the only, issue on which this dialogue is not only promising, but also needed.

This is also underlined by Michele Marsonet, who in his “Different Pragmatist Reactions to Analytic Philosophy” adds some historical notes. Pragmatism and analytic philosophy – he affirms – share many similarities, such as the interest in scientific results and methods and the request that philosophers give serious reasons in support of their assertions, aspects which can be traced back to the key role that intersubjectivity plays in both traditions. This has undoubtedly been fundamental in the initial encounter between them. Later, Marsonet says, neopositivists endorsed scientism while pragmatists did not, as they denied the existence of one and only one true method to be adopted both by science and philosophy. This historical frame is what enables Marsonet to introduce the not so well-known figure of Nicholas Rescher, whose originality is often neglected. He compares Rescher with Quine, Sellars and Rorty, portraying his pragmatic idealism as rooted in evolutionism and in a new and sometimes problematic account of the relation between factual and logical truths as well as between subject and object. In the distance between Rescher and Rorty, particularly, he sees a continuation of the difference between the objective pragmatism as defined by Peirce and Lewis (and Rescher) and the subjective pragmatism represented by James and the early Dewey (and Rorty). He concludes that the end of philosophy prophesied by Rorty is inevitably considered by Rescher a wrong answer to the acknowledgment that philosophy cannot detach itself from history; on the opposite, philosophical activity, as a sort of “intellectual accommodation”, is requested in our everyday life at least as much as physical accommodation.

Turning from the historical to the more theoretical issues, the relation between pragmatism and analytic philosophy rotates around some main themes, which can be used as guides to give an idea of the different points of view that are expressed in the single essays. These themes can be individuated as couples of entangled concepts: naturalism and scientism; facts and values; actions and practices; perception and meaning; truth and realism. We can thus deal with some aspect of the different contributions by means of dealing with these main concepts, avoiding a plain description of the single essays in order to privilege a more unified and dialogical reasoning.

**Naturalism and scientism**

According to Marsonet, as we have just seen, the first big divide between analytics and pragmatists was that the former endorsed scientism, the latter refused it in the name of methodological pluralism. Between the two world wars the move towards the rigor of scientific discourse had success, but later on, when the underground influence of pragmatism came more openly to the surface, the entanglement between science and ethics and the impossi-
bility of a perfectly neutral scientific method were more commonly acknowledged. Also, we could add, what was going on in the field of philosophy of science, with Thomas Kuhn and Paul Feyerabend, was not that distant from these perspectives. But what sort of relation can be drawn between scientism and naturalism, considered that naturalism was, differently from scientism, usually supported by the pragmatist scholars? A clarifying contribution in this direction comes from Mario De Caro’s essay, “Beyond Scientism”, that aims to define and distinguish scientism, scientific naturalism and other forms of naturalism. Scientific naturalism, as it is ordinarily described by its supporters, De Caro argues, can be characterized by three main claims: the constitutive thesis, for which philosophy does not admit any supernatural entity; the antifoundationalist thesis, for which there is no such thing as a “first philosophy”; the continuity thesis, for which philosophy must be a partner of science. But scientific naturalism thus conceived can be criticized for different reasons. One of these is that it often idealizes contemporary science describing it as methodologically and ontologically unified, where it is not; here, again, we meet methodological pluralism as a (pragmatist) opponent to scientism, similarly to what we found in Marsonet. De Caro espouses a weaker version of the three premises of scientific naturalism, and pointing towards what here and elsewhere he calls liberal or liberalized naturalism, he agrees with many issues of pragmatism, such as, for example, the compatibility but not the reduction of philosophy to scientific theories, and the insistence that values and facts can hardly be detached from each other. What this description leaves open to a further analysis, is how pragmatism itself can be studied as proposing not one single form, but different forms of naturalism, in connection with the different ideas of science that its representatives held. It could indeed be interesting to go beyond an abstract identification of the characteristics of scientism and naturalism, to investigate whether and how classical and contemporary pragmatists in their writings concretely used a naturalistic, but not scientific, view of the world.

Facts and values

As regards the entanglement between facts and values, which we have just mentioned, two other essays contained in Calcaterra’s volume have to be considered: Rossella Fabbrichesi’s “The Entanglement of Ethics and Logic in Peirce’s Pragmatism” and Giovanni Maddalena’s “Wittgenstein, Dewey and Peirce on Ethics”, which share an interest in Peirce’s ethics and in its connection with logic and the hierarchy of sciences. Fabbrichesi traces back Putnam’s idea of the entanglement between facts and values to Peirce’s normativity of logic. Putnam, criticizing how neopositivist and analytic philosophers often attempted to keep rigidly separated facts and values, points out that the ideals of scientific and theoretical research are implicitly ethic, in their preferring consistency, simplicity, plausibility, order; and notes that pragmatism already had affirmed that in every acknowledgment of a “pure fact” there is a value judgment. Peirce includes logic, together with ethics and aesthetics, in the normative sciences and this inclusion is the reflection of his idea of pragmatic meaning. Fabbrichesi’s paper focuses then on Peirce’s “future-tense conception” of interpretation and inference and on the bond between this ethical commitment and the public nature of truth, linking it to the dialectic between the particular and the general. As regards Maddalena, his starting point is a question: is Rorty right in affirming the surrender of philosophy to literature and to politics, on the grounds of the ineluctable gap between what is normative and what is real? He first examines Wittgenstein and Dewey’s accounts

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1 De Caro, Macarthur (2004).
of ethics (the two philosophers that Rorty mainly refers to), and then proposes Peirce’s theory as a way out that permits to avoid Rorty’s conclusion. Wittgenstein, in the *Tractatus* and in the 1929 *Conference on ethics*, considers ethics as a view of the world, and then as a phenomenological experience, but not as a science of behavior. In the *Philosophical Investigations*, the absolute value has lost its absoluteness and is now embodied in use and in life, but again we cannot make of ethics a science. What is normative and what is real are separate. In Dewey, there is an apparent unity of thought and practice, consciousness and reality, but if we look at his philosophy more accurately, according to Maddalena, we see that dualism is both the starting point of his analysis of moral theory (desire and thought), and the always present risk of its conclusion, because in social values we can see a double aspect: private satisfaction and public utility (Maddalena, p. 90). So in Dewey too we cannot say that what is normative and what is real are really unite. On the contrary, if we consider Peirce’s view and particularly his semiotics and his classification of sciences, we find a final unity. Ethics indeed is inserted in a hierarchy of sciences, it has a precise role in knowledge and continuity among sciences is a reality: this is what could prevent Rorty from drawing his dualistic conclusion.

Fabbrichesi and Maddalena’s insights seem to converge on the relevance of the continuity between logic, science and ethics, though their perspective do not perfectly overlap. In the latter’s case, with reference to Wittgenstein, it is said that if we cannot make of ethics a science, it means that ethics and reality are separate. But we could work also in the opposite direction, and ask ourselves whether science has not in itself already an ethical dimension. In the later Wittgenstein we may find exactly this suggestion, that is, the idea that any description of reality is part of a Weltbild and has a normative dimension. Thus, it is not only in Peirce, but also in Wittgenstein, that we could find the entanglement between facts and values and between logic and ethics. Furthermore, going back to Fabbrichesi’s analysis of the public dimension of inference and truth, new elements for a useful comparison could be found in Wittgenstein’s treatment of following a rule and of the impossibility of a private language.

**Actions** and practices

Vincent Colapietro’s contribution (“Allowing our Practices to Speak for Themselves”) goes in this direction, comparing Wittgenstein and Peirce on rules and practices and challenging the traditional view according to which Wittgenstein’s so-called quietism is at odds with the pragmatists’ meliorism. The centrality of practices and the later Wittgenstein’s work to clarify what they are, how they function, which is our place inside them, in Colapietro’s opinion still needs to be appreciated by pragmatists. Practices are not decided by rules and rules are not fixed; we learn to follow rules in familiar and social contexts, with other people as teachers and judges, we learn by doing and do by learning. We are compelled but also free in the same time, so that our practices must be granted the opportunity to speak for themselves.

An interesting connection can be drawn here with John McDowell’s characterization (in his “Pragmatism and Intention-in-Action”, still in this volume) of the pragmatist idea of action as an exercise of a skill, manifesting a practical intelligence, a conception that avoids commitment to the Cartesian image of thought as something happening in a separated inner

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2 Wittgenstein (1922); Wittgenstein (1965).
3 Wittgenstein (1953).
realm. The relation that, following Colapietro, we can establish between a practice and its rule, parallels the relation that, following McDowell, we can establish between an action and its intentional content. Just like practice embodies a rule, and does not simply apply it, action embodies an intention, and does not simply apply it. There is no gap between practice and rule, nor between action and intention. McDowell particularly examines Sellars5 and Brandan’s models for intention-in-action and concludes that none of the two truly respect the pragmatist conception of action, because they both remain anchored to the idea that action is something that comes after thought. Starting from Sellars, who actually does not conceive his proposal as a variety of pragmatism, McDowell argues that he thinks of unexpressed thought on the model of speech, and of linguistic practices as language games5. He distinguishes three moves in language games: those starting from outside the game and finishing inside it (language-entry transitions, like reports of perceptions), those within the game (intralinguistic transitions, inferences) and those starting from language and finishing in action (language-exit transitions); practical reasoning in this model is precisely what constitutes the starting point for actions. In this way, actions are conceived as exits from the sphere of the conceptual, and this can hardly accord with the pragmatist idea of thought as present in behavior and not separable from behavior. Brandom, on the other hand6, who explicitly declares his theory to be pragmatist, applies the Sellarsian vision of actions as exits only in connection with intentions for the future, and characterizes intentions-in-actions in a strict sense according to an idea of action as acknowledging a commitment. But conceiving practical commitments as dispositions to say “yes” to an action, in McDowell’s reading, Brandom, too, thinks about intention-in-action as a response to something (this is what an assent is), and thus not really “in” action, but separate from it. For this reason, according to McDowell, neither Sellars nor Brandom have caught the pragmatist intuition of conceiving intention-in-action as a practical skill to be found within the action itself.

It may be, then and again, in Wittgenstein’s idea of practices, read through Colapietro’s lenses, that such an account could find a good interlocutor. Following, among others, Stanley Cavell and Naomi Scheman7, Colapietro also helps us to see in Wittgenstein both the search for the ordinary and the escape from the ordinary, so that human practices are at the same time our home and our prison, and we are called not only to acknowledge our traditions – what has usually been associated with Wittgenstein – but also to acknowledge that our home is always an exile. In this light, Colapietro invites us not to forget the polemic and critical aspect of many of Wittgenstein’s remarks, which is often misrepresented and which, once seen, can be considered another point of convergence with pragmatism.

Perception and meaning

The theme of intention-in-action leads us into another set of correlated concepts, such as those of perception, conceptual content, representation, meaning, and more generally the relation between mind and world, to remain in a McDowellian framework8. Nathan Houser (“Action and representation in Peirce’s pragmatism”), stating the difficulty of defining both analytic philosophy and pragmatism, explores the possibility of a dialogue between these two “family resembles” schools of thought by applying Peirce’s idea of perception and of experience to the problem of the relation between mind and world, as addressed by McDowell.

5 Sellars (1963); McDowell refers to the first stage of the myth of Jones, hence to paragraphs XIV and ff.
8 McDowell (1994).
well. Indeed, Peirce’s concept of thought as answerable to the world and at the same time instrumental in the course of events, seems to fit perfectly in McDowell’s dilemma of how thought (which is normative) can be tested in “the tribunal of experience” (which is natural). Normative thought, that is, all thought – Peirce would agree with McDowell on this – belongs to the logical space of reason; therefore, how can experience be a valid test or tribunal for it? Can we prove our concepts to be correct if experience is conceived as exclusively sensory and not conceptual? This is where Peirce’s ideas of perception, experience, knowledge can be of help. Houser focuses on this well-known passage by Peirce: “The elements of every concept enter into logical thought at the gate of perception and make their exit at the gate of purposive action; and whatever cannot show its passports at both those two gates is to be arrested as unauthorized by reason”⁹. In perception, Peirce sees two elements: the percept, which “forces upon us” and is absolutely dumb; and the perceptual judgment, that professes to represent the percept, and belongs to the logical space of reasons. What is the bridge between the two? It is – Houser argues – a virtually unconscious “proto-abductive inference that relies more on instinct than on reason” (Houser, p. 67). The point is that these perceptual judgments are to be checked not by a backwards appeal to sensory experience, but by experiences to come, so that our conduct, the outcome of thought, will be justified or falsified by future experience. In this way, experience does indeed serve as a tribunal for the reliability of conceived consequences. Whether this reference to the future, and the enlargement of the concept of experience that is so pointed out, meets the need for a reconciliation between the two reigns of sensibility and intellect, and whether this accords or not with McDowell’s own solution of the problem, is surely a matter worth working on in still more detail.

Another essay that focuses on the relation between mind and world is Eva Picardi’s “Pragmatism as anti-representationalism?”, which is particularly centered on the nature of thought and on whether it is true or not that, as Rorty affirms¹⁰, pragmatism conceives it as inferential and not representational. In Rorty’s view, representationalism leads to relativism, because, as Donald Davidson has shown¹¹, any representation is relative to a scheme. Although some representationalist’s central issues – such as that “thinking at” is prior to “thinking that” and that a given sentence has always a definite meaning – are too stark, in Picardi’s opinion their critiques to representationalism are not always wrong; for example when they point out that for inferentialists it is difficult to explain the compositionality of meaning. Picardi’s conclusion is that Rorty’s idea of anti-representationalism as a univocally positive characteristic of pragmatism is over simplified. Anti-representationalism is not always a feature of pragmatism, neither old nor new, and it is not always a merit; representationalism itself, though purified from some of its questionable tenets, can be useful for good theories of meaning and of thought. Thus, in Picardi’s articulated work, the relation between pragmatism and analytic philosophy appears to be much more complex that any simple account could represent.

Truth and realism

The last couple of themes with which we can close our review is the most general and, probably, the one on which there has been the highest number of misunderstandings in the history of pragmatism: the concept of truth and the idea of realism that it entails. The two

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¹⁰ Rorty (1990: 3).
¹¹ Davidson (2001: 46).
essays which will help us to clarify the matter are Maurizio Ferraris’ “Indiana James” and Ivo Assad Ibri’s “Semiotics and Epistemology: The Pragmatic Ground of Communication”; the former is linked to the traditional early-analytic critique that Bertrand Russell moved to the pragmatist conception of truth, the latter develops what we can call a semiotic conception of reality. Ferraris’ aim is to investigate James’ theory of truth relating it to the problem of ontology, thus also clarifying Russell’s criticism towards him. James’ theory of truth is baptized by Russell “Transatlantic Truth”\(^{12}\) and is identified with this definition: “True ideas are those that we can assimilate, validate, corroborate and verify”\(^{13}\). Ferraris takes this to mean that truth is what is convenient for us to believe, and on the basis of this he confronts James’ positive attitude towards the existence of God with his (James’) negative attitude towards the hypothesis of the “Automatic Sweetheart”, a soulless body indistinguishable from a lovely human being (an example famously discussed also by Hilary Putnam\(^{14}\)). If truth is what is convenient for us to believe – asks Ferraris – why shouldn’t we believe in the Automatic Sweetheart? The answer is that, in refusing to believe this, James is actually accepting the correspondentist theory of truth, or what Ferraris calls the “Pacific Truth”. Pacific Truth is committed to ontology, that is, to the idea that objects are what resists our will, and in refusing the Automatic Sweetheart – this is Ferraris’ diagnosis – James is revealing never to have abandoned this idea. In Ferraris opinion, this shows that Russell and James were not talking about the same thing: Russell was concerned with ontology, James with epistemology, or – at best – with a theory of scientific knowledge. Unfortunately, Ferraris relegates James’ reformulation of the criterion of correspondence to a footnote (Ferraris, p. 58), and in so doing he probably misses the point of a serious reconsideration of what is at stake. Evidently Ferraris assumes that only a strong commitment with an ontologically based theory of truth allows the hypothesis of knowing what is true and what is not. But this seems to be the premise, as much as the conclusion, of his argument. Let us consider James’ words about correspondence, even limiting our investigation to the short passage cited by Ferraris: to agree with reality is “to be guided” towards it or “to be put onto a working touch with it as to handle it (...) better than if we disagreed”\(^{15}\). Ferraris considers this definition as “not very convincing”, but reading through James’ undoubtedly vague words we can foresee an idea of correspondence in which the direction (“to be guided”) and the skill or the ability to do something (“to handle it better”) are key features. It is here that the last essay which we are considering can be of help. Ivo Ibri (“Semiotics and Epistemology: the Pragmatic Ground of Communication”), working not on James but on Peirce, proposes an idea of reality according to which the world is, by itself, meaningful. That is: language is not the creator of sense, but a mere representative of sense, whereas meanings are already in the world and in its natural signs. Perceiving the natural signs contained in the world, we are guided by them, as James suggested, so that a Peircean semiotic conception of reality can be put directly in relation to James’ “Transatlantic Truth”. Realism and semiotics in Peirce are linked with his complex philosophical system: Ibri’s essay offers an interesting reading, that we can sum up in the expression “semiotic realism”. Peirce’s three categories and his vision of a symmetry between subject and object are the starting points of Ibri’s argument, that at its very beginning needs to face a seemingly unavoidable circularity: on the one hand, realism seems the necessary ground for semiotics and logic, and, on the other, if we want to read signs in reality, semiotics must shape the ground for realism

\(^{12}\) Russell (1908); Russell (1966).

\(^{13}\) Cfr. James (1907: 97).


\(^{15}\) James (1907: 102).
itself. It is indeed the symmetry between subject and object, phenomenologically understood as modes of being, that permits to avoid circularity acknowledging that their respective structure is the same, and knowledge is materialized in the universal forms of objects. But this leads us beyond language, because reality does not manifest its semiotic quality only by linguistic concepts. In other words, we must acknowledge a semiotic nature also to each natural and human occurrence. For this to be possible, there has to be a continuity between experience and concept, and this is what is meant by Peirce’s idealism of objective content, that does not conflict with, but rather strengthen, his realism. Peirce’s logic, read through the lenses of his realism, allows a wider conception of semiotics that concerns not only language but the world itself, characterized by a meaningful nature.

The link between Ibris’ reading and the issue raised by Houser, regarding mind and world and the conceptual nature of perception, is, I think, clear, and it is clear that, according to this reading, the idea of truth that pragmatism entails is not confined to epistemology but has deep ontological consequences. This evidently contrasts Ferraris’ “new realist” conception of truth and his interpretation of James, and highlights ontology as one of the main themes on which the dialogue between pragmatists and analytics still has much to say.

Two more suggestions and a conclusion

Finally, it must be mentioned that the Italian edition of the volume also includes two more essays, by Rosa Calcaterra and by Damiano Canale and Giovanni Tuzet: they were unfortunately left out of the English edition due to technical reasons, but it is nevertheless much worth devoting some words to them too. Calcaterra’s essay particularly can be connected to the debate on realism: it deals with James’ conception of truth as it is seen by Hilary Putnam. The intertwining among truth, utility and reality that characterizes James’ position and his adoption of truth as a regulative ideal are central for Putnam’s reflection on internal realism and for his proposal of truth as an idealization of warranted assertibility. The dimension of collectivity is here introduced as another mainstay of realism, and, again, the dialogue between pragmatist and analytic traditions confirms to be the most current and topical: Ferraris’ “new realism” and his work on documentality, but also John Searle’s social ontology, owe much to the acknowledgement of the relevance of this collective dimension in the building of reality itself. Another interesting comparison is presentend in Canale and Tuzet’s essay, which confronts Peirce, Searle and Brandom on the theory of assertion, particularly focusing on the kind of commitment and responsibility that an assertion entails: does it commit the speaker to the truth of what he asserts, or to the sincerity of his words? The most interesting position is here that of Brandom, whose starting point is the social practice of attributing and acknowledging beliefs to the speakers on the basis of their assertions. Adopting this typical pragmatist criterion, he is able to overcome the limits of a conception of belief based on mental states, and to work on what in Peirce had remained implicit, that is, the distinction between two kind of inferences: one going from the assertion to the beliefs, which commits the speaker to sincerity; the other going from the assertion to its practical consequences, which commits the speaker to the truth of what he says.

To sum up and conclude, the essays collected in Calcaterra’s volume are excellent examples of how the two traditions of pragmatism and analytic philosophy, when working together, are able to clarify their own identities and to produce new and sometimes unexpected results. Furthermore, it is worth noticing how the different attitudes expressed in the

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essays are reflected in different interpretations that the authors give of some key figures. For example, Colapietro and Maddalena’s idea of Wittgenstein and particularly of Wittgenstein’s ethics are quite different, since the former, focusing on the importance of practices and on their primacy above rules, tends to connect directly the ethical dimension with the descriptive one; while the latter affirms that the two dimensions are clearly distinguished both in the early and the later Wittgenstein. Besides, Michele Marsonet and Eva Picardi clearly diverge on the interpretation of Rorty’s philosophy on relativism: Marsonet equates Rorty to relativism, while Picardi highlights that it is because Rorty wants to avoid relativism that he espouses (incorrectly, in her view) anti-representationalism. The presence of these differences is, I think, one of the positive qualities of this book, as it shows that the debate is still open and lively. To make pragmatism and analytic philosophy interact seems to be a precious means for doing philosophy, that is, to see things from different perspectives in order to get a more complete idea of their meanings.

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Filipe Carreira da Silva


**George H. Mead: a therapy for the malaise of modernity?**

In his recent volume on Mead, Filipe Carreira da Silva proposes an interpretation of the pragmatist’s thought that develops through three fundamental points of reference. According to the author, science, selfhood and democratic politics constitute «the pillars» of a new approach to the problem of modernity; an approach in which the mutual interchange between these moments projects on the theoretical level a *reflection* of the relational dynamics exerted by human beings through their language and their historical evolution. The interchange among these pillars foresees the development of a sort of logical progression whose key passages consist of the glide of these moments from the one to the other. Carreira da Silva maintains that the approach to modernity expressed by Mead’s social theory can offer more than one well-grounded answer to the problems of our time. With reference to this problematic area, Charles Taylor’s diagnosis could be the right term of comparison, even if in Carreira da Silva’s work Taylor’s positions remain in the background. So we could ask to ourselves if and in which ways an effective therapy to the discomforts of our modernity would be carried out through Mead’s suggestions, as it seems possible to hold through this book.

«*The Making of a Classic*»

From the research of Carreira da Silva emerges a framework capable to give back authenticity to the thought of the pragmatist without sacrificing its depth and its wealth of articulations. Also because of the outwardly fragmentary character of his works, in fact, the destiny of the theoretical reflection of George H. Mead has often coincided with a restrictive use of his seminal suggestions. According to Carreira da Silva, this happens especially in the approach of H. Blumer to the meadian theory of social act. In Blumer’s approach to Mead, Carreira da Silva recognizes: «an almost undistinguishable presentation of his own thought and Mead’s ideas.» [51]. To build his interactionist perspective, Blumer would have *used* Mead’s theory of social action only to develop an alternative to Parsons’ structural functionalism. This required a sort of *canonization* of Mead in the sociological field. [Part I, Chap. 4: The Making of a Classic, 49-62] This process of canonization, consolidating the fragmentary character of Mead’s work, really accentuated the sectorial way of the approach to Mead by such an authoritative interpreter. That way, in fact, was not always unaware, and sometimes instrumental.

Carreira da Silva recognizes the presence in Habermas of an intent similar to that carried into effect by Blumer and points out that the two readings of Mead, despite the differences of method and results, are correlated among them and converge toward a same direc-

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tion: «Habermas’s criticism of Mead’s alleged “idealistic deviation” is very much in line with the widespread belief that Blumer’s symbolic interactionism, due to Mead’s influence, is incapable of dealing with large-scale structural social phenomena.» [55; 151-162]. In Habermas’ Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns, Mead’s suggestions become an useful tool to argue the author’s thesis, but the way according to which the social theory of the pragmatist is reconstructed «is directly linked to the theoretical objectives of the social scientist who reconstructs it». In the case of Habermas «Mead’s thinking is reconstructed so that the linguistic turn suffered by philosophy in the 1960’s can be expanded to sociology through a paradigm shift—from purposive or instrumental action to communicative action.» [54].

Restoring Mead’s profile

The formulation of the leading problem of Carreira da Silva’s volume directly feels the effects of these preliminary notations addressed towards two great interpreters of Mead that became ‘classics’ in their turn. Particularly, towards Habermas and his School (especially Axel Honneth) it would burden the result of an interpretative run that to Carreira da Silva appears forced, that is, the aim to reach Mead passing through Hegel (the first philosopher who – according to Habermas – put modernity in terms of a problem). What Carreira da Silva wants to show, in the first place, is that in wide measure the problem of modernity in Mead sets aside from any premise of idealistic character and constitutes itself around the three great moments of the evolutionistic science, the genesis and value of individuality, the opportunity to constitute a democratic society on these bases. In substance, what makes the notion of modernity transmitted by the thought of Mead particularly incisive is its capability to answer to the problematic situations of the present in a direct way. The expectations that Carreira da Silva deposes in Mead’s reading lean on these results and, on the basis of these results, the pragmatist can really be considered a classic. Nevertheless, a classic must be respected such as a classic and his thought must be contextualized; therefore, the meanings of Mead’s social theory must be understood for what they represented in the frame of the society of his time. So, if it is right to depart from the likeness between the critical situation of our time and Mead’s historical epoch for grounding the great relevance to the present of his thought, nevertheless the researcher is not allowed to make Mead’s theory up-to-date, neither to level different historical times upon a same judgment, flattening them. On this plan, the results of the work of Carreira da Silva fall into line with those expressed in the best tradition of studies on Mead.3

Mind, self, society, and beyond

This book by Carreira da Silva not only contributes to a best knowledge of the thought of Mead, but really shows that a philological approach to the text, not enslaved to mere erudition, is the only approach that allows a ‘productive’ relationship with its author. A relationship that is capable to gather Mead’s approach to modernity without updating his thought or distorting the sense of his message. On a philological plane, Carreira da Silva handles his subject with the utmost exactitude by means of a careful examination of the sources, published and unpublished. In this way, he disavows the historiographic skepti-
icism traditionally related to *Mind Self and Society* and shows that Mead’s text does not lean on improvised connections among notes of students but is founded on the shorthand work of professionals. The reasons for Mead’s ransom from the theoretical cages in which he has been situated by a conspicuous part of his interpreters primarily send the attention back to this book. Truly it represents a fundamental starting point, since it literally sets the foundations of an even more articulated and complex approach to the problem of reality. On this matter, it is worth to remember the pioneering judgment of David Victoroff that, in 1953, already opened a breach in the compact front of Mead’s scholars warning that the pragmatist was not to consider only «a sociologist», but rightfully «a philosopher».

The *Philosophy of the Act* and the *Philosophy of the Present*, broadly considered in order to the expansion of social problems in a *cosmological* sense, still attend to be investigated through a key of reading able to enucleate the connected philosophical implications relating to the transformations of science and to their ethical and political relapses. It could be interesting to examine, in fact, if Mead’s lesson relating to a renewed plan of understanding of the *extended dynamics* between *individuality* and *sociality* could still open a new, fruitful way to put the basis of democratic politics and to recognize the more incisive ‘*productivity*’ of joint and several liability relations between human beings.

References


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G.H. Mead (1863-1931) is often portrayed as a thinker of exceptional import and originality whose unwillingness to write down his ideas has prevented him from achieving an even greater recognition in fields as varied as sociology, social psychology or philosophy. According to this view, the task of current practitioners is to engage with the scant materials available, including lecture notes, and make the best of it to re-examine contemporary problems. Gert Biesta and Daniel Tröhler, the editors of the book in review, are among the latest to join the large number of commentators who have employed this particular approach over the years.

Such an approach, of course, has some advantages. One advantage is to make use of materials that are much easier to read than Mead’s own writings. A substantial part of the success of *Mind, Self, and Society* is due exactly to its conversational tone, a far easier read to undergraduates than the journal articles in which Mead dealt with those very same issues. The same can be said of *The Philosophy of Education*, a fairly accessible and pedagogical introduction to Mead’s ideas on the subject of learning and education. A second advantage is related to the widening of scope of Mead’s contributions. By not limiting themselves to Mead’s own writings, Biesta and Tröhler are able to uncover materials of interest to domains of inquiry beyond those already familiar with Mead’s work. As they convincingly show in the introduction, this certainly seems to be the case with education, a research area that has a lot to gain from Mead’s insights on the production of meaning.

Meaning, according to Mead, is an emergent of the interaction between selves and objects: the meaning of an object lies in what it means to us, in our response to it. To understand the meaning of an object is not so much a question of *discovery* of some objective reality as it is a matter of *creation*. The implications of this for educational purposes are far-reaching. As the editors explain in the introduction, “meanings cannot be handed down to the learner, but arise ‘only through the reaction of the learner’”. “From this it follows that the communication of meaning is not a process of imitation. For Mead, education is a process of creative (trans)formation of meaning”. But, of course, “education is not simply about evoking *any* response from the learner; the key question is how and to what extent the response of the learner can be ‘organized’”. Education, understood as the “conveying of meanings”, is “not a process of imitation, but a process of action and reaction, of social stimulation and response. It is, in other words, a creative process, a process in which meaning is constantly made, rather than reproduced” (6-7). The editors go on to conclude, in my view convincingly, that:

“In all of this, we can see a theory of education in which the child is not simply the receiving end of the process. Education is not the transfer of meaning from the teacher to the learner, from the parent to the child, from the current generation to the next generation. Education is a process of communication in which the child is as much a meaning-maker as the adult is. For Mead, the child is not an empty vessel that has to be filled; the child ultimately is a source of new meanings and of the renewal of meaning” (8).
In formal terms, the editors’ work deserves applause. The criteria they followed are consistent and allow the reader to know the status of the materials offered to them: this is not a verbatim record of Mead’s words in the classroom, but lectures notes of Mead’s course on “philosophy of education” taken by a student, Juliet Hammond; the titles the editors added to many of the lectures are clearly indicated by square brackets, as are all their other additions and changes; helpful notes throughout the text help the reader navigate these lecture notes taken a century ago.

The Philosophy of Education comprises 38 lectures delivered by Mead in 1910-11. Each lecture offers a brief discussion of a particular topic, with some repetition (Mead usually begins by resuming what he taught in the previous lecture), and without much detail or sophistication: this was, after all, an undergraduate course. In the first half of the course, Mead provides an overview of his social conception of education, discussing concepts such as “consciousness of meaning”, the different phases of the self, gesture, object, perception, reflective consciousness, or value judgements. In lectures 17 and 29, Mead discusses Greek classical philosophy in order to historically reconstruct the genesis of social consciousness. The last nine lectures continue to trace the historical development of this process of social consciousness to the modern era, with particular attention to the scientific method, for, as Mead points out, “The problem of education then is that of introducing a method of thought” (168).

There is, however, a general problem with this sort of undertaking. The assumption that Mead published very little is simply wrong. During the course of his career, Mead published over 100 papers, including journal articles, book chapters and other smaller pieces. There is also a substantial amount of unpublished manuscript materials. There is no need, therefore, to rely on lecture notes taken by students in order to have access to Mead’s ideas, including his ideas on education. On both the production of meaning and educational matters (not only from the perspective of the philosophy of education, but also from the perspective of school systems, vocational training, etc.), there are plenty of other sources to rely upon whose authorial status is unquestionable. Why rely on a third person’s account, especially someone who was not primarily concerned with the accuracy of Mead’s discourse like Juliet Hammond, when one can have Mead’s own written words? Besides this non-trivial issue, there is the problem of the relevance of the lectures themselves. Originally intended with a specific pedagogical purpose, these in no way offer us Mead’s ideas in all their complexity and richness. What one gains in accessibility, one looses in rigour and density. It is high time students and scholars start to engage with Mead primarily on the basis of his own writings, which are both numerous and easily accessible, and stop relying on third persons’ accounts of his words.

The Philosophy of Education is a useful, carefully edited secondary source for all those interested in Mead’s pragmatist perspective on educational matters. But it should not to be taken as a primary source. That privileged status should be reserved to Mead’s own writings, not lecture notes.
J. R. Shook and J. A. Good (eds.)


The book reviewed here makes available an important lecture on Hegel’s philosophy of spirit that Dewey delivered at the University of Chicago in 1897. Less than one hundred pages long, the lecture aimed to introduce students to a critical understanding of the third part of Hegel’s *Encyclopedia of Philosophical Science*. It is preceded by two introductory essays written by the editors – namely, Shook’s *Dewey’s Naturalized Philosophy of Spirit and Religion* and Good’s *Rereading Dewey’s “Permanent Hegelian Deposit”*. Broadly speaking, they are devoted respectively a) to highlighting the fundamental tenets of Dewey’s naturalistic philosophy of spirit and religion, and the different phases through which he passed in turning from his original adhesion to Calvinism into his later acceptance of humanistic naturalism; and b) to establishing the influence exerted by Hegel on Dewey’s thought. Their immediate function consists in providing a contextualization of the lecture, both in the light of Dewey’s further philosophical development and in relation to his effort at coming to terms with the complex Anglo-American idealist tradition in which he had been nurtured.

This contextualizing work is particularly welcomed. In fact, the decade that Dewey spent in Chicago (1894-1904) is undoubtedly the most enigmatic (and, at the very same time, the most fascinating) period of his whole life; and it is highly probable that the difficulties that Deweyan scholars usually encounter when dealing with it may affect the comprehension of the lecture itself. As is well known, the greatest part of the interpretative problems that arise quite naturally when a historical reconstruction of Dewey’s philosophical development is attempted are due to Dewey’s willingness to integrate different languages and perspectives into a single and coherent conceptual framework. The direction of this long process of drifting away from Hegelianism is not controversial: the combination of such different approaches as theory of evolution, functional psychology, and (plausibly, but this is a highly debated point among interpreters) Hegelian idealism eventually drove him to abandon his early neo-Hegelianism in favor of a more empirically oriented, experimental account of experience and thought. What is still lacking is precisely an accurate study of the history of his emancipation from neo-Hegelianism, and, more specifically, an account of the role Hegel’s philosophy played in redirecting the course of Dewey’s philosophy.

From this viewpoint, the 1897 lecture on Hegel constitutes a fundamental source for gaining an understanding of what Dewey was aiming at. Undoubtedly, it provides decisive evidence that, at the end of 19th century, Dewey still viewed Hegel as an important philosophical interlocutor. Therefore, any reading suggesting that Dewey immersed himself in the study of contemporary scientific psychology as a way to escape the pitfalls of German idealism can be considered as manifestly unfounded. However Shook and Good are not content with this minimal and rather uncontroversial conclusion. On the contrary, they believe that a much stronger consequence can be derived from Dewey’s interest in Hegel’s
philosophy of spirit. In their view, the latter stands out as a reliable sign of Dewey being persuaded that a reflection on Hegelian philosophy can supply him with powerful tools for achieving the goal of shaping his new approach to philosophical problems (pp. vii-viii). More generally, the fundamental assumption lying at the basis of Shook and Good’s interpretation is that Dewey’s mature instrumentalism and naturalism – whose main tenets will first be announced to the world in the Studies in Logical Theory (1903), and then further developed in his mature works – cannot be properly understood unless one pays attention to the complex revision of Hegelianism that he had undertaken during the 90’s, of which the 1897 lecture on Hegel is a remarkable moment. As is evident, the latter thesis is much more difficult to defend, because it involves some very strong methodological and interpretative assumptions – such as the grounding hypothesis that this lecture on Hegel provides some valuable insights having direct bearings on a correct interpretation of Dewey’s philosophy. Indeed, it is evident that Dewey’s lecture on Hegel is avowedly expository: in many cases, he seems to limit himself to reporting Hegel’s argument, rather than trying to express his own philosophical position. Therefore, it would be rash (to say the least) to conclude that Dewey is actually defending all the theses that he expounds, because it would entail that he is willing to endorse the whole Hegelian philosophy of spirit. Obviously, Shook and Good are aware of these problems, and they attempt to prevent possible objections by appealing to a modest interpretative strategy, which prescribes a more cautious approach to the text. Its leading principle is that a correct evaluation of the theoretical relevance of the lecture can be gained only through a continuous reference to the other books and articles that Dewey wrote in the very same years, as well as in his mature phase. It is indisputably true that when Dewey’s lecture on Hegel is presented as a tile in the complex mosaic formed by his overall production, the picture that Shook and Good aim to defend becomes much more convincing.

This last remark sheds light on an aspect which should not be overlooked. It is worth noting indeed that the book in its entirety is intended to have a militant tone, so that some of its most interesting features risk to passing unnoticed if it is read and used as a critical edition, with textual apparatus and commentary. In the Preface of the volume, the editors write that there is a “debate, which shows no sign of abating even now, about the extent to which his later works contain a mixture of Hegelian and pragmatist element” (p. vii). Since Sterling Lamprecht’s article on the idealist source of Dewey’s logic (1925)\(^1\), scholars have been discussing the plausibility of an idealist reading of Dewey’s philosophy; and since Morton White’s widely influential book The Origin of Dewey’s Instrumentalism\(^2\), it has become common to argue that “[Dewey] made a complete break from Hegelianism around the turn of the century”\(^3\) (vii). Now, the editors claim that this image takes Deweyan scholars captive, because it prevents them from seeing that Dewey’s philosophical development is much more complicated and nuanced than has typically been considered. The two editors have devoted their greatest efforts, both historical and theoretical, to the criticism of this standard interpretation. The results of their previous research – which is condensed in two seminal books, namely Shook’s Dewey’s Empirical Theory of Knowledge and Reality and Good’s A Search for Unity in Diversity\(^4\) – lay the ground for understanding the reasons for which they

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\(^1\) S. Lamprecht, An Idealistic Source of Instrumentalist Logic, in Mind, 33 (1924), pp. 415-427. See also F. C. Schiller, Instrumentalism and Idealism, in Mind, 34 (1925), pp. 75-79.


ascribe such importance to this text. Thanks to their groundbreaking work on Dewey’s in-
tellectual sources, the two editors of the present volume did manage to dramatically change
the shape of Deweyan scholarship, by setting a new agenda of issues that deserve attention.
It is now widely accepted that a distinction should be drawn between Hegel and neo-
Hegelians; that the greatest attention should be paid to the strictly philosophical (not simply
personal) influence exerted on Dewey by the St. Louis Hegelians; that Dewey never aban-
donied idealism, but rather undertook an original attempt to naturalize its main tenets; that
his reading of William James’ *Principles of Psychology* did not represent a radical break in
his philosophical development, but on the contrary acted as a spur that allowed him to re-
fine those original insights which he had formulated during his idealist apprenticeship; that
Dewey does not belong to the pragmatist tradition, and that his realization of Peirce’s rele-
ance for his own philosophical project has to be dated to the second decade of the 20th cen-
tury. It is in light of this complex framework that the proper significance of the text here
presented, and the multi-faceted motives that prompted Shook and Good to edit it, stand out
in their clarity. The proper function of Dewey’s lecture on Hegel is that of confirming –
somehow indirectly, because of its expository nature – a very complex and articulated his-
torical and philosophical interpretation whose main tenets are formulated elsewhere, name-
ly in those books and articles through which Shook and Good took part in the still ongoing
debate on Dewey’s early philosophy and, in general, his overall philosophical development.

Once the militant tone of the publication has been highlighted – pointing out that the
philosophical value of the whole book lies as much in its bearing on Deweyan scholarship
as in the results that the concrete work of historical reconstruction achieves —, and its main
theoretical coordinates have been defined, it is possible to start the discussion proper. I in-
tend to proceed as follows. First of all, I will discuss briefly the main points of Dewey’s
lecture on Hegel, relying on the illuminating remarks provided by Good in his essay, which,
amongst other things, is a very useful guide to reading Dewey’s text. Trying to summarize
Dewey’s exposition would be useless, because, in many cases, it would amount to a mere
repetition of Hegel’s arguments. So, I will limit myself to underline those aspects that have
the greatest significance in the economy of Dewey’s thought, and, consequently, provide
the best standpoint from which to understand the permanent deposit Hegelianism left on
Deweyan philosophy. After that, I will focus my attention on a couple of points which –
though they have not been stressed enough – corroborate the interpretation that Good ad-
vances. Moreover, I will raise objections to two theoretical assumptions that I think are not
fully supported by facts, but that are accepted by both Good and Shook. Then I will outline
what I believe to be the most interesting aspects of Shook’s argument. The decision not to
follow the publication order of the essays is a direct consequence of their different “proxim-
ity” to the subject matter of the lecture. Indeed, while Good’s contribution wrestles closely
with the text, Shook looks at it from some distance. The different perspective points
adopted by Good and Shook yield an intriguing result: they respectively provides a fore-
ground and a background knowledge of Dewey’s complex relationship with Hegelian phi-
losophy. The best description of the theoretical presuppositions and objectives of their deli-
berate division of work is given by the editors themselves in the Preface of the volume:

“We propose in our chapters to explore Dewey’s philosophy of religion in general and his
inheritance from Hegel of a ‘philosophy of spirit’ in particular. We agree that Dewey did
have a philosophy of spirit, that it was heavily indebted to Hegelian themes, and that
Dewey’s resulting philosophy of religion is a key component of his social and political
theory” (ix).
Finally, I will express a general reservation concerning a methodological and interpretative assumption that the editors accept without questioning, but which is – in my opinion – in need of revision. Obviously, the revision is not intended to be a rejection of their approach, but rather an attempt of refining some of the theoretical presuppositions that lie at the basis of the conclusions they draw from their analysis of Dewey’s lecture on Hegel.

As has already been remarked, the lecture is characterized by an expository approach to its subject matter. For this reason, Dewey integrates his exposition of Hegel’s philosophy of spirit with pieces of information about his life and with a schematic account of Hegel’s most important theses of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Consequently, Dewey’s lecture is naturally divided into three parts. The first thirty-four paragraphs are devoted to highlighting the main events of Hegel’s boyhood, his formation at the seminary in Tübingen, and his philosophical development during the years that he spent as a private tutor in Berne and Frankfurt. The three central paragraphs focus on the *Phenomenology of Spirit*: Dewey’s main interest here concerns the philosophical reasons that led Hegel to break with his former friend Schelling. From paragraph 38 to paragraph 155 Dewey presents Hegel’s *Philosophy of Spirit*, and, as Good observes, “Dewey closely tracks Hegel’s outline” (73).

According to Good, three aspects deserve particular attention. To begin with, it is worth noting that the most original part of the lecture is the first one. Indeed, freed from the necessity of following the course of Hegel’s argument, Dewey formulates what he believes are the fundamental tenets of Hegelian philosophy. Therefore, it is the opening section that one has to take into consideration in order to see which Hegelian themes drew Dewey’s attention, and what image of Hegel he intended to propose to his students. Dewey defines Hegel as a “great actualist”, meaning with this expression that Hegel “had the greatest respect, both in his thought and in his practice, for what actually amounted to something, actually succeeded in getting outward form” (97). Good rightly remarks that nothing is more distant from Dewey than the often-repeated charges that Hegel’s idealism is a reduction of the external world to mind, or that it betrays the concreteness of experience. Hegel, Dewey argues, is “never more hard in his speech, hard as steel is hard, than when dealing with mere ideals, vain opinions and sentiments and sentiments which have not succeeded in connecting themselves with this actual world” (97). It is not a case that Dewey pays the greatest attention to an interesting trait of Hegel’s method: “self-effacement [is] the first law of the intellect” (94). Individual opinions must be suppressed in order to let things speak for themselves, because “the highest activity of thought is that which will make itself the pure expression of the facts” (95). If these assertions are put in relation with Dewey’s powerful insight that, for Hegel, “thinking is simply the translation of fact into its real meaning” (96), a clear image begins to take shape. Dewey does not lean toward a metaphysical reading of the Hegelian philosophy of spirit; on the contrary, he is fascinated by those realistic aspects of Hegel’s thought that found an objective, non-spectatorial theory of knowledge. Good implicitly suggests that if one were compelled to indicate the single Hegelian theme that left the greatest deposit on Dewey’s mature philosophy, the actualist conception of thought would probably be the most natural choice. The fact that Dewey stresses Hegel’s rejection of the idea of mind as passive spectator is remarkable since, to use Good’s words, “the rejection of mind/body dualism, faculty psychology, and the passive spectator theory of knowledge are all prominent features of Dewey’s mature thought” (64).

Secondly, Good informs the reader that Dewey’s sketch of Hegel’s philosophical development relies mainly on three sources: Caird’s book on Hegel, from which he quotes extensively, Royce’s articles on German philosophy, and Rosenkranz’s groundbreaking monograph entitled *Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel’s Leben*. According to Good, Dewey’s
highly selective use of secondary literature is remarkable because it provides evidence that he consciously decided to exploit only those texts which were functional to the constitution of his anti-metaphysical reading of Hegel. For this reason, for instance, Dewey does not mention Rudolf Haym’s *Hegel und Seine Zeit*, in which a reading of Hegel’s thought as the official philosophy of Prussian conservatism is formulated. On the contrary, precisely because of its insistence on Hegel’s appreciation for the concreteness of life, Dewey cannot help but appreciating the account of Hegelian philosophy provided by Rosenkranz – a major representative of the Center Hegelians who defended a third way alternative to the conservatism of the right wing Hegelians as well as the atheist and revolutionary thought of the left wing Hegelians. It was Rosenkranz who, having gained access to Hegel’s early unpublished writings and to his short political essays, was able to elaborate an image of his whole work as a grandiose attempt to come to terms with the “problems raised by the emergence of modern thought and culture” (62-63). By exploiting Rosenkranz’s insights on the fundamental tone of Hegelian philosophy, Dewey lays stress upon the fact that, contrary to Kant and Fichte, “Hegel’s original impulse was not from the study of philosophy as such” (108). Obviously, Dewey does not intend to deny that Hegel eventually came to express his ideas in a highly technical language; however, the problems that prompted Hegel to undertake serious studies were not strictly philosophical, but rather political, historical, and theological. Good rightly puts great emphasis on Dewey’s insistence on this fact: it is a sign that apart from any specific agreement on particular issues, Dewey’s acceptance of Hegel’s philosophy is based on a profound sympathy with the spirit and intentions that animate Hegel’s thought. Moreover, it sheds light on the type of philosophical work Dewey considered worth carrying out, as well as on the kind of philosopher he aimed at becoming: according to Dewey, the genuine philosopher is the one who faces the true problems of life, without losing himself in technicalities that have no bearing on the solution of the concrete difficulties that men encounter in their daily experience.

The third point to which Good draws the attention is Dewey’s interest in Hegel’s theory of causation. Good remarks that Dewey believes this theme to be so important that he decides to digress from the argument of Hegel’s *Philosophy of Mind* in order to clarify its theoretical relevance. As is well known, in his logical texts Hegel distinguishes between two different ways of conceiving the relation of cause to effect: the point of view of understanding and the point of view of reason. While the understanding severs the connection between causes and their effects, assuming that they are ontologically independent, reason shows their intimate unity, by pointing out that they are simple moments within an organic process. No ontological distinction can be drawn between them because a cause becomes a cause only when it produces its effect. Therefore, Hegel argues that, to use Good’s incisive expression, “cause and effect are more fruitfully seen as reciprocal moments within an organic process rather than linear relations” (75). Dewey enthusiastically endorses the Hegelian theory of causation, and puts it at the basis of his own conception of reality, life, and reason. So, for instance, Dewey writes: “each member of the animal body is cause and effect of every other: each organ is at once means and ends of every other” (115). Moreover, the organicist theory of causation is also the key to understanding Dewey’s theory of emotion and his concomitant critique of mind/body dualism. Strangely enough, Good deals with it only incidentally, but this aspect is so relevant that it should have deserved a larger treatment than a few lines in a footnote. In fact, Dewey’s rejection of the Darwinian “expressionist” conception of emotion – according to which emotions are ontologically and epistemically independent from their bodily expressions – relies precisely upon the refusal of distinguishing between an inner cause (the emotion) and an outer effect (the organic mod-
ification). Finally, Dewey’s organicist view of the means-ends relationship reflects the very same logic of Hegel’s organicist theory of causation: as a cause is a cause if and only if it produces its effect, so a means is a means only because it actually leads to the end in which it finds its complete realization. Thence, the Deweyan theory of rationality, as expounded in Logic: Theory of Inquiry and in Theory of Valuation, should not be seen as departing from his early idealism; on the contrary, it is a variation on the theme of the Hegelian insistence on the essential continuity between cause and effect.

Two brief remarks and a reservation may be added to complete what has been said. First of all, contrary to William Wallace’s translation decision, Dewey uses Spirit rather than Mind in order to express the German word Geist. Through this terminological choice, Dewey aims at preventing any mentalistic reading of Hegelian philosophy grounded upon an erroneous assimilation of Hegel’s conceptual framework to a Berkeleyan-like subjective idealism. Therefore, Good’s interpretation is not only plausible and consistent from a theoretical point of view; it is also founded on sound textual evidence. Secondly, Dewey puts great emphasis on the notion of meaning as the key to understanding the essence of Hegel’s philosophy. From the very beginning of his philosophical career – at least from Knowledge as Idealization (1887) –, Dewey had been devoting great effort to clarify those intellectual operations through which sensuous material is enriched by new meaning. Accordingly, when he states that, for Hegel, “thinking is the translation of fact into its real meaning” (p. 96), Dewey is reading Hegelian philosophy through the spectacles of his previous theoretical achievements: by doing so, he focuses his attention on the centrality of the process of idealization for a full-fledged idealism. Meaning and idealization are two intertwined threads that run through Dewey’s early production, and lie at the basis of his mature attempt of defining the relationship between primary and secondary experience. What is worth noting here is that, since Dewey’s confrontation with Hegel concerns precisely the way to account for the relationship existing amongst thought, meaning, and reality, it is a pivotal episode in the history of Dewey’s theoretical effort to formulate a consistent account of meaningfulness of experience. Indeed, Dewey found in Hegel’s absolute idealism a fully developed theory of objective reason, thanks to which he managed to overcome those pitfalls which stem from the dualistic assumptions that had infected, among others, Kant and T. Hill Green’s critical idealism. Consequently, Good is right in highlighting that Dewey’s emancipation from the specific brand of neo-Hegelianism developed by Green cannot be understood unless one pays attention to the contribution afforded by his assimilation of Hegel’s thought.

What I find less convincing in Good’s argument is the too sharp distinction that he draws between Hegel and Neo-Hegelianism, and his thesis (shared by Shook) that the young Dewey “made the same sort of Kantian move as the British neo-Hegelians” by appealing to the idea of “perfect personality […] as a way to ground philosophy” (58). Starting with the first issue, it is important to note that, far from being a monolithic reality, neo-Hegelianism was a highly complex movement of thought, which refuses to be boiled down to a set of doctrines held by all its members. This is particularly evident when books and articles written by neo-Hegelians during the 1880’s are taken into account. Indeed, in 1883 Francis Bradley publishes the first edition of his Principles of Logic: in the preface he explicitly affirms that “I never could have called myself a Hegelian, partly because I cannot say that I have mastered his system, and partly because I could not accept what seems his main principle”; and he adds that “as for the ‘Hegelian School’ which exists in our reviews,
I know no one who has met with it anywhere else." In 1887 Andrew Seth publishes his Hegelianism and Personality, in which Absolute Idealism is rejected in favor of a form of personalism largely indebted to Leibniz’s idea of monadology. One year later, Haldane replies to Seth’s criticism by reminding him of the original spirit of neo-Kantianism—a label used by Haldane to refer to the very same historical fact that Good and Shook name neo-Hegelianism—, that is, its being an analysis of actual knowledge rather than a metaphysical theory of reality. Therefore, to assume that Dewey was opposed to neo-Hegelianism überhaupt would be a too simplistic interpretation of his relationship with the philosophical tradition in which he grew up.

The impression that Dewey’s rejection of neo-Hegelianism is wholesale is probably due to a partial misreading of an important letter to William James, dated May 05, 1891. While discussing the well-known passage of the Principles of Psychology, in which James criticizes neo-Hegelian theory of consciousness as formulated by Green and Caird, Dewey states that “Hegel seems to me intensely modern in spirit […], and I do not like to see him dressed up as Scholasticus Redivivus – although of course his friends, the professed Hegelians, are mainly responsible for that”. Now, it is true that Dewey is willing to draw a distinction between Hegel and some of his Anglo-American followers. However, as the rest of the letter shows rather clearly, the distinction is much less radical than it may seem at first glance. Indeed, contrary to James’ general criticism, Dewey is careful to distinguish Green’s neo-Kantian and, consequently, substantially dualistic analysis of consciousness from Caird’s Hegelian-inspired theory of self. What Dewey is aiming at, therefore, is less to contrast Hegel and neo-Hegelians than to defend his own position from James’ attack. In the context of his discussion with James, Dewey prefers to use the terms of his opponents, and to clarify his own view—which is strongly dependent on Caird’s version of absolute idealism—through a redefinition of those assumptions that led James to that erroneous theoretical conclusion.

In any case, from what has been said, it does not follow that Good’s distinction between Hegel’s philosophy and neo-Hegelianism is illegitimate and completely useless from a historiographical point of view. In reality, it is worth being preserved for at least one fundamental reason. It highlights the fact that one cannot understand Dewey’s “psychological” version of absolute idealism unless attention is paid to the Anglo-American philosophical tradition in whose terms he came to assimilate Hegel’s thought. Indeed, the philosophical problems Dewey perceived as being the most urgent are not identical to those with which Hegel was concerned. Three differences are particularly relevant here. First of all, the extremely rapid development of psychological and biological sciences put the problem of providing an account of perception at the center of philosophical concerns. Secondly, Hegel’s philosophy of objective spirit became a widely accepted theoretical platform that supplied sociologists, linguists, and anthropologists with a sound conceptual framework. Philosophers as different as Comte and Hegel could be read as recommending the same solution to the issues concerning the nature of society, and the relevance of the latter for the genesis of individual mind. Thirdly, Hegelian philosophy was interpreted as a powerful tool for defending a religious view of the world. Indeed, Hegel’s multifaceted concept of spirit was transformed into a metaphysical notion that supported a strong claim concerning the essence of reality. When all these things are considered, it then becomes possible to fully ap-

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5 A. Seth, Hegelianism and Personality, W. Blackwood and Sons, Edinburgh and London 1887.
6 R. B. Haldane, Hegel and His Recent Critics, in Mind, Vol. 13, No. 52 (1888), p. 586. See also A. Seth’s reply in Hegel and His Recent Critics, in Mind, Vol. 14, No. 53 (1889).
preciate the historiographical importance of the distinction drawn by Good between Hegelian philosophy and the neo-Hegelian tradition: it makes clear that Dewey’s reading of Hegel was neo-Hegelian, and that even in those cases in which he contrasted Hegel’s original doctrines with some idiosyncratic theses upheld by some of the neo-Hegelians, he was still moving within a distinctively neo-Hegelian framework.

All of these previous remarks shed an important light on Dewey’s problematic use of the notion of personality. Good and Shook agree that Dewey’s exploitation of the notion of perfect personality in his early writings – and, in particular, in his Psychology (1887) – is a reliable sign of his adherence to some form of neo-Hegelianism; and they maintain that it is only through its rejection that Dewey eventually came to formulate a consistent approach to the problems of ethics and logic. It is undoubtedly true that during the 1890’s Dewey’s philosophy was idealistic, but the shift of attention from the abstractness of his early metaphysical and theological concerns to concrete facts of life paved the way to the development of his later naturalism. In such a reconstruction, the concept of perfect personality acts as a stumbling block to the growth of Dewey’s philosophy. What is even more important to note is that, according to Good, what prevented the young Dewey from formulating a thorough idealistic philosophy was that, at that time, he was too Kantian to abandon the view elaborated by British neo-Hegelians. Good’s reconstruction goes on as follows: “As he began to criticize the neo-Hegelians, Dewey jettisoned the notion of a transcendent absolute that grounded philosophy […]. Rather than a move away from Hegel’s absolute idealism, this was a move away from neo-Hegelianism and toward Hegel” (58-59).

No one should deny that the very idea of perfect personality is a key neo-Hegelian notion. Moreover, it is also evident that, sometimes and especially in his popular writings, Dewey tends to give a religious tinge to his philosophical theses. By doing so, the wrong impression may be conveyed that in his early phase he was concerned with a quest for a philosophical foundation of Christian belief in a divine personal God. In reality, Dewey’s appeal to the notion of perfect personality is part of a complex theoretical strategy aiming at correcting the intrinsic dualism of such neo-Kantians as Thomas Hill Green. Dewey gives the following definition of the idea of perfect personality: it is “the motive, source, and the realization of the life of the individual” (EW 2: 361). Perfect will is, therefore, the absolute standpoint an agent has to endorse to avoid inconsistencies caused by the Kantian unwillingness to discard the dogmatic assumption that human reason and will are finite and limited by the existence of a thing-in-itself. That this is Dewey’s aim is confirmed by the following remark: when the perfect will is recognized by an agent as the motive of his action, “the source of his concrete actions is no longer the will that the ideal and the actual ought to be one […], but it is the will that they are one; and this specific case […] is the manifestation of this unity” (EW 2: 361). Seen from this perspective, far from being a residual of neo-Kantianism as the editors of the book maintain, Dewey’s notion of pure personality stands out as the single theoretical device that warrants the validity of the process of idealization of sensations or, in other words, the process of embodiment of the ideal in material. If this reading is correct, an even stronger continuity in Dewey’s philosophical development can be detected. It follows indeed that Dewey never changed his mind about the general philosophical standpoint that should be adopted in order to formulate a sound idealistic philosophy. What Dewey recognized as inadequate and in need of revision is, rather, the technical, specific theory of mental activity that was intended to substantiate that general standpoint. It is at that level that the theoretical import of Dewey’s assimilation of Hegel’s philosophy becomes evident, as has been proven by Good’s brilliant analysis.
Obviously, the reservations advanced here do not affect the value of Good’s argument. Indeed, his reconstruction of Dewey’s argument is faithful, and the overall picture of what the permanent Hegelian deposit on Deweyan philosophy amounts to is convincing and stimulating. The philosophical value of his account consists in the fact that it provides a reliable canon of exegetical interpretation that directs and controls specific theoretical research. So, for instance, it explains in which sense, and to which extent, it is appropriate to encompass both Hegel’s and Dewey’s later thought under the label of organicism and actualism. At the same time, it corroborates what at first glance may seem a mere suggestion, namely Good’s assertion that

“when Dewey reflects on the psychology of individual humans, in works such as Human Nature and Conduct, he articulates a philosophy of subject spirit”, and “when he reflects on the history of Western civilization, in works such as Reconstruction in Philosophy and The Quest for Certainty, he develops a philosophy of objective spirit” (60).

An accurate historical account paves the way to a more sophisticated and controlled evaluation of possible theoretical similarities between the two later philosophical proposals. It would be erroneous, however, to conclude that Hegel’s influence on Dewey boils down to its effects on the development of the latter’s philosophical outlook. Indeed, it was Dewey himself who called attention to the emotional, non-intellectual significance of his encounter with Hegel. In *From Absolutism to Experimentalism*, Dewey states that “Hegel’s synthesis of subject and object, matter and spirit, the divine and human, was, however, no mere intellectual formula: it operated as an immense release, a liberation” (LW 5: 153). Therefore, any account that overlooks this “existential” aspect of the Hegelian influence on Dewey would be unsatisfactory because of its incompleteness. Among many other things, Shook’s *Dewey’s Naturalized Philosophy of Spirit and Religion* intends precisely to highlight how Hegelian philosophy interacts and merges with the whole body of Dewey’s religious and ethical convictions, which were formed before he came in contact with Hegel and the neo-Hegelian tradition. Accordingly, it aims a) to outline the fundamental traits of Dewey’s implicit metaphysics, b) to shed some light on those assumptions that Dewey never discussed or criticized, but that unconsciously shaped his whole philosophical outlook, and c) to point out the intellectual debates in which Dewey took part, and in reference to which he elaborated and refined his conceptual apparatus.

Shook supplies the reader with an intriguing narration about what he calls “Dewey’s evolving stance about religion” (7). He distinguishes four phases of Dewey’s philosophy of religion and spirit. 1) Dewey’s early devotion to Christianity was decisively influenced by his mother’s adhesion to New England Congregationalism, even though he gradually came to prefer “the anti-Calvinistic themes of universalism” (6). The first years of his life were characterized by an “instinctive trust in democracy and sympathy with universalism” (20). 2) During the years spent at the University of Vermont, he realized for the first time that universalism and democracy support each other, although he was not ready yet to formulate a comprehensive philosophical view of how they hang together. 3) It was in the light of these interests and theoretical concerns that Dewey assimilated Morris’ Hegelian organicist philosophy. The theory of progressive self-realization that Dewey first expounded in his *Psychology* is the most visible fruit of his effort to develop a consistent idealistic view of the place of religion in man’s life. Therefore, it was Hegel who provided Dewey with a set of concepts that made it possible to satisfy what Dewey himself calls an intense emotional craving for unity (LW 5: 153). 4) Starting from the end of 19th century, Dewey jettisoned
any remnant of theological language, and declined his idealistic convictions within a naturalistic framework. As Shook rightly remarks, “having integrated faith, responsibility, and society”, and having developed a sound logic of inquiry, “Dewey’s mature philosophy offers a unified and coherent theory of religion, morality, and politics” (20).

The reconstruction articulated by Shook makes evident in which sense, and to what extent, Dewey’s “humanistic naturalism is the culmination of [his] search for a philosophy of spirit” (20). Shook’s main theses are a) that Dewey’s later philosophy plunges its roots in the theological debate in which he took part in the last decades of the 19th century, and b) that Dewey’s mature formulations are best understood when seen as more conscious attempts to answer the very same problems that prompted him to study philosophy and to accept the Anglo-American version of Hegelian idealism. So, for instance, Shook rightly notices that the opposition between the two schools of social reform that Dewey discusses at length in *Human Nature and Conduct* parallels the contrast between libertarianism and determinism that was common in the Calvinistic circles in which Dewey was reared. At the same time, Shook highlights that Dewey’s solution to this problem relies upon his exploitation of the Hegelian idea of self-realization, once due attention is paid to the fact that, as a consequence of his insistence on the idea of natural and social environment, Dewey’s mature concept of self-realization is much more naturalistically oriented than his early version of the same notion. Even more evident is Hegel’s influence on Dewey’s theory of religious experience as formulated in *A Common Faith*. As Shook incisively remarks, “Dewey’s theory of the divine represents a pragmatic development of the Hegelian organic metaphysics that he had sought early in his career” (31).

In addition, Shook’s work has far-reaching methodological implications. Indeed, leaving aside the specific results obtained, it is worth noting from a historiographical point of view that in this contribution a description is provided of the “emotional reasons” that guided Dewey to his views on religion, democracy, and morality. By doing so, Shook supplies a new additional perspective that puts into sharper focus the significance of Dewey’s creative assimilation of influences from his intellectual environment, such as, to name only the most important ones, James’ biological psychology and Santayana’s idealistic naturalism.

In conclusion, Shook and Good’s reconstruction of Dewey’s intellectual development, and their provocative account of his later humanistic naturalism, shake the traditional image of Dewey’s philosophy to its very foundations. Indeed, the ultimate aim of their work consists in putting Dewey scholarship on new, sounder footing characterized by a rigorous investigation of the different sources of Dewey’s thought and an approach more sensitive to its historical conditioning. It is not rash to say that the concrete results obtained in the present book show that this goal has been achieved in the main. What remains to be done is – at least in my opinion – to cast some legitimate doubt on the historiographical validity of the autobiographical article *From Absolutism to Experimentalism*, which both Shook and Good seem to use as an unproblematic source of information about Dewey’s life and career. It is undoubtedly true, as Shook has pointed out in *Dewey’s Empirical Theory of Knowledge and Reality*, that Dewey’s sketchy description of his years of philosophical apprenticeship as a long drifting away from Hegelianism has been an important factor in determining the abandonment of the traditional image revolving around the conviction that Dewey’s philosophy experienced a sudden, sharp, and quite inexplicable reversal somewhere between 1893 and 1896. However, since the traditional image does not hold us captive any-

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more, it is possible to proceed further, and criticize a tool that has been very useful, but may now turn into a stumbling block for future research. Obviously, this does not amount to saying that the autobiographical reconstruction that Dewey outlined in *From Absolutism to Experimentalism* is false. What I am suggesting is, rather, that Deweyan scholars should be more sensitive to the context in which Dewey wrote that article, and pay more attention to the goal that he was trying to reach. Originally published in a volume entitled *Contemporary American Philosophy* (1930), *From Absolutism to Experimentalism* is a militant article, in which Dewey wants less to offer a faithful account of his personal philosophical development than to put forward an interpretation of the American tradition, and of his own place within it. Dewey’s autobiographical sketch is vague, in the sense of being general enough to be minimally faithful to the real historical circumstances, and, at the very same time, plastic enough to be functional to the creation of a narrative able to contrast, on a rhetorical level, the widespread diffusion of epistemology in North America during the 1920’s. Once the problems stemming from Dewey’s autobiographical remarks are put aside – such as, to name only the most notable ones, the confusing vagueness of the label Hegelianism, the perplexing declaration that “no very fundamental vital influence” issued from books, his questionable assertion that James’ *Principles of Psychology* has dramatically influenced his thought –, it should be easier to understand more clearly some controversial aspects of his philosophical development. In my opinion, two lines of research are particularly interesting and promising. On the one hand, a rigorous analysis of the way in which Dewey read James’ *Principles of Psychology*, in the light of his knowledge of state-of-the-art psychology and biology of the time; on the other hand, an inquiry into Dewey’s place in the pragmatist tradition. The issues dealt with in the present book – that is, Dewey’s assimilation of Hegel’s idealism in general, and his philosophy of spirit in particular – play a pivotal role in both these histories.